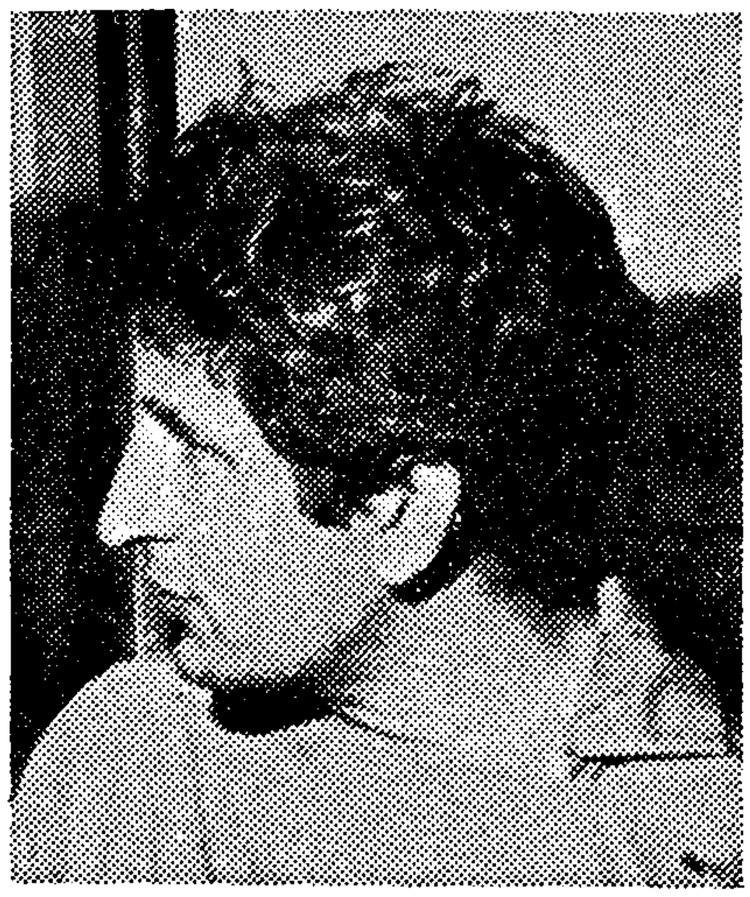
www.forgottenbooks.com

Copyright © 2016 FB &c Ltd.
All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law.

Ramsey & Muspratt, Cambridge

Gerald Moore was born in London in 1924 and read English at Cambridge. He began to be interested in African writing during three years he spent as an extra-mural tutor in Nigeria. From 1956 to 1960 he was the first director of extra-mural studies at Hong Kong University and visited China, Siam, Cambodia, and Malaya. Since 1960 he has been director of extra-mural studies at Makerere College in Uganda. He is a member of the *Black Orpheus* committee and his first book, *Seven African Writers*, was published in 1962.



Ulli Beier was born in Germany in 1922 and studied literature in England. Since 1950 he has been living in Nigeria, where he is a lecturer in the department of extra-mural studies at University College, Ibadan. He is editor of the literary magazine, *Black Orpheus*, and in 1961 helped to found Mbari, a club for Ibadan writers and artists, which is already having an influence on African cultural life. He is also joint-editor of 'Mbari Publications'. Among his books are *Yoruba Poetry* (1959), *Art in Nigeria 1960* (1960), and *West African Mud Sculpture* (1962).

Cover design by Massimo Vignelli

EX LIBRIS
UNIVERSITY of FLORIDA

Ramsey & Muspratt, Cambridge

Gerald Moore was born in London in 1924 and read English at Cambridge. He began to be interested in African writing during three years he spent as an extra-mural tutor in Nigeria. From 1956 to 1960 he was the first director of extra-mural studies at Hong Kong University and visited China, Siam, Cambodia, and Malaya. Since 1960 he has been director of extra-mural studies at Makerere College in Uganda. He is a member of the *Black Orpheus* committee and his first book, *Seven African Writers*, was published in 1962.

Ulli Beier was born in Germany in 1922 and studied literature in England. Since 1950 he has been living in Nigeria, where he is a lecturer in the department of extra-mural studies at University College, Ibadan. He is editor of the literary magazine, *Black Orpheus*, and in 1961 helped to found Mbari, a club for Ibadan writers and artists, which is already having an influence on African cultural life. He is also joint-editor of 'Mbari Publications'. Among his books are *Yoruba Poetry* (1959), *Art in Nigeria 1960* (1960), and *West African Mud Sculpture* (1962).

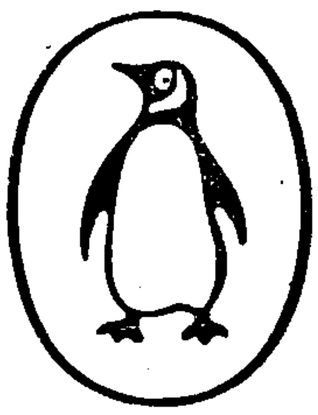
Cover design by Massimo Vignelli

PENGUIN AFRICAN LIBRARY AP7

Edited by Ronald Segal

Modern Poetry from Africa

GERALD MOORE AND ULLI BEIER



Modern Poetry from Africa

EDITED BY GERALD MOORE

AND ULLI BEIER

Penguin Books

808.81
M33qm
c.2

Penguin Books Ltd, Harmondsworth, Middlesex
U.S.A.: Penguin Books Inc., 3300 Clipper Mill Road Baltimore 11 Md
AUSTRALIA: Penguin Books Pty Ltd, 762 Whitehorse Road,
Mitcham, Victoria

This selection first published 1963

This selection copyright © Gerald Moore and Ulli Beier, 1963

Made and printed in Great Britain
by Cox and Wyman Ltd,
London, Fakenham, and Reading

Set in Monotype Plantin

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not,
by way of trade, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise disposed
of without the publisher's consent, in any form of binding or
cover other than that in which it is published

Contents

Acknowledgements 11

Introduction 13

MADAGASCAR

Jean-Joseph Rabéarivelo Four poems from *Traduits de la nuit*:
(2) 'What invisible rat' 33
(3) 'The hide of the black cow' 33
(4) 'She whose eyes' 34
(17) 'The black glassmaker' 35
Cactus 36

Flavien Ranaivo Song of a Young Girl 37
Song of a Common Lover 38

SENEGAL

Léopold Sédar Senghor In Memoriam 43
Night of Sine 44
Luxembourg 1939 45
Totem 46
Paris in the Snow 46
Blues 47
The Dead 48
Prayer to Masks 49
Visit 50
All Day Long 50
In what Tempestuous Night 51

CONTENTS

Léopold Sédar Senghor	New York	51
	You Held the Black Face	54
	I will Pronounce your Name	54
	Be not Amazed	55
David Diop	Listen Comrades	56
	Your Presence	57
	The Renegade	57
	Africa	58
	The Vultures	59
	To a Black Dancer	59
	Nigger Tramp	60
Birago Diop	Diptych	62
	Omen	63
	Vanity	63
	Ball	64
	Viaticum	64
GAMBIA		
Lenrie Peters	Homecoming	69
	Song	70
	We have Come Home	70
GHANA		
Kwesi Brew	A Plea for Mercy	75
	The Search	76
Ellis Ayitey Komey	The Change	77
G. Awoonor-Williams	Songs of Sorrow	78
	Song of War	80
	The Sea Eats the Land at Home	81
NIGERIA		
John Pepper Clark	Olokun	85
	Night Rain	86
	The Imprisonment of Obatala	87

CONTENTS

John Pepper Clark	Easter	88
	For Granny (from Hospital)	88
	Ibadan	89
	Fulani Cattle	89
	Cry of Birth	90
	Abiku	91
Gabriel Okára	The Snowflakes Sail Gently Down	92
	Piano and Drums	93
	Were I to Choose	94
	The Mystic Drum	95
	Adhiambo	96
	Spirit of the Wind	97
	One Night at Victoria Beach	98
Frank Aig-Imoukhuede	One Wife for One Man	100
Michael Echeruo	Sophia	102
Christopher Okigbo	Love Apart	103
	Eight poems from *Heavens-gate*:	
	Overture	103
	Eyes Watch the Stars	104
	Water Maid	104
	Transition	105
	Sacrifice	105
	Passion Flower	106
	Lustra	106
	Bridge	107
	Four poems from *Limits*	
	Siren (*& the mortar is not yet dry. . . .*)	107
	(1) 'Suddenly becoming talkative'	107
	(2) 'For he was a shrub among the poplars'	108
	(3) 'Banks of reed.'	108

CONTENTS

Christopher Okigbo	(4) 'An image insists'	110
Wole Soyinka	Telephone Conversation	111
	Death in the Dawn	112
	Requiem	113
	Prisoner	115
	I Think it Rains	116
	Season	117
	Night	118
	Abiku	118
CONGO (BRAZZAVILLE)		
Tchicaya U Tam'si	Brush-fire	123
	Dance to the Amulets	123
	Still Life	124
	A Mat to Weave	124
CONGO (LÉOPOLDVILLE)		
Antoine-Roger Bolamba	Portrait	129
	A Fistful of News	130
CAPE VERDE ISLANDS		
Aguinaldo Fonseca	Tavern by the Sea	135
SÃO TOMÉ		
Aldo do Espirito Santo	Where are the Men Seized in this Wind of Madness?	139
ANGOLA		
Agostinho Neto	Farewell at the Moment of Parting	145
Antonio Jacinto	Monangamba	147
SOUTH AFRICA		
Mazisi Kunene	To the Proud	151
	The Echoes	152
	Farewell	152
	As Long as I Live	153

CONTENTS

Bloke Modisane	lonely	154
NYASALAND		
David Rubadiri	An African Thunderstorm	159
KENYA		
John Mbiti	New York Skyscrapers	163
Joseph Kariuki	Come Away, my Love	164
MOÇAMBIQUE		
José Craveirinha	The Seed is in Me	167
	Three Dimensions	168
Noemia de Sousa	Appeal	169
Valente Malangatana	To the Anxious Mother	171
	Woman	172
Sources of the Poems		173
Notes on the Authors		175
Index of First lines		183

Acknowledgements

FOR permission to republish the poems in this anthology acknowledgement is made to the following:

For Awoonor-Williams to *Ikyeame*, Accra; for Antoine-Roger Bolamba to Présence Africaine, Paris; for Kwesi Brew to *Ikyeame*; for John Clark to *Black Orpheus*; for José Craveirinha to Pierre-Jean Oswald, Paris; for Birago Diop to Présence Africaine; for David Diop to Présence Africaine and *Black Orpheus*; for Aguinaldo Fonseca to Pierre-Jean Oswald; for Antonio Jacinto to Pierre-Jean Oswald; for Ellis Ayitey Komey to *Black Orpheus*; for Valente Malangatana to *Black Orpheus*; for Agostinho Neto to Pierre-Jean Oswald; for Gabriel Okara to *Black Orpheus*; for Jean-Joseph Rabéarivelo and Flavien Ranaivo to Presses Universitaires de France; for Aldo do Espirito Santo to Pierre-Jean Oswald; for Léopold Sédar Senghor to Éditions du Seuil, Paris, and *Black Orpheus*; for Noemia de Sousa to Pierre-Jean Oswald; for Wole Soyinka to *Encounter* and *Black Orpheus*; for Tchicaya U Tám'si to Caractères.

THIS PAGE IS LOCKED TO FREE MEMBERS

Purchase full membership to immediately unlock this page

Get Smart

Over 2,000 years of human knowledge in 797,885 volumes

Instant access $8.99/month

Continue

*Fair usage policy applies

This gesture, simultaneously one of rejection and assertion, was Négritude. In the words of Aimé Césaire, 'Blackness is not absence, but refusal.' The fact that the gesture itself was often made from the genial surroundings of a Paris café, that it was often an affair of the intellect and emotions rather than of manners or ways of life, does not alter its cardinal importance in the development of modern African poetry. The gesture of Négritude embraces a good deal of the poetry in this book, notably that of Senghor, David Diop, Birago Diop, and the Congolese poets U Tam'si and Bolamba. Without some understanding of it, at least in its historical importance, it is impossible to see any shape in the poetic events of the continent over the past twenty years.

The two poets of Madagascar included here, though enthusiastically embraced by Senghor in his exciting *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache* (1948), do not belong entirely in the company of their French African contemporaries. Madagascar was the last part of the African world (with which it is now generally classed) to fall under French rule, yet it was the first in which France practised her cultural policy of *assimilation* with even limited effectiveness. The island was not fully occupied by French troops until 1896, and one of the first acts of the strongly anti-clerical metropolitan government was to close down hundreds of mission schools which had already sprung up there. Soon, however, this policy was reversed and France began producing a small Malagasy élite which could assist in the administration of the country. By the 1920s Madagascar had produced a poet of genius who wrote and thought in French, Jean-Joseph Rabéarivelo. This tragic and brilliant figure, with his passionate love of French literature, was so effectively *assimilé* that he committed suicide in 1937 when the local officials persistently blocked his efforts to go to France. His poetry is undoubtedly influenced by the symbolists; there are echoes of

Laforgue's Pierrotesque tone in *What invisible rat*, and perhaps of Rimbaud in *Cactus*. Yet his poetry is very strongly itself. The brilliant intensity of its imagery, like Leconte de Lisle's, may be the feature which most marks him as a child of the tropics. Rabéarivelo never hectors the reader in the modern didactic manner, but instead leads him confidently into his own visionary world. His ability to sustain, elaborate, and explore a single image throughout an entire poem, as in *Cactus* or *The black glassmaker*, distinguishes him from the more *engagés* poets of French Africa. Furthermore, at the time when Rabéarivelo was writing, Madagascar did not regard itself as part of the African world, a world of which it was only dimly aware.

In Flavien Ranaivo, a more recent poet, Madagascar asserts its own poetic traditions more vigorously. The slangy insolent tone of his verse reveals an authentic inspiration from the popular vernacular songs of the island. *Song of a Young Girl* combines very successfully this lounging gait with a delightful impudence of language, while *Song of a Common Lover* employs the line-by-line ingenuity of the riddling ballad.

Madagascar has a third established poet in Jacques Rabemananjara. He has played a valiant part in his country's liberation, and suffered imprisonment for many years after the savage suppression of the 1947 revolt. He is not represented here because his rhetorical, rather long-winded poetry does not translate well into English and is difficult to quote shortly with proper effect. Much more clearly than the other two, he belongs to the Négritude tradition, and in the company of other poet-politicians like Senghor, Damas, Césaire, and Keita Fodeba.

Senegal is the only part of the African mainland which really witnessed *assimilation* in practice. Elsewhere it was not even attempted until after 1946 and was abandoned altogether as official policy some ten years later. Léopold

INTRODUCTION

Sédar Senghor was one of the very few Senegalese to find his way to a French university before the war. Born in 1906 of a Serere family in the little Portuguese settlement of Joal, he came to Paris in 1928 and soon after met the two men with whom he was to be associated as an apostle of Négritude, Aimé Césaire of Martinique and Léon Damas of French Guinea. It was Damas who first found a voice for the group of Negro 'exiles' in Paris in his bitter, staccato volume *Pigments*, issued by G.L.M. in 1937 and later destroyed by the French police:

> ...my hatred thrived on the margin of culture
> the margin of theories the margin of idle talk
> with which they stuffed me since birth
> even though all in me aspired to be Negro
> while they ransack my Africa.*

But it was Césaire who two years later coined the word *Négritude* and established himself as the chief poet and inspiration of the movement with his great poem *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal.* This poem was soon afterwards hailed by André Breton as a surrealist masterpiece; but in his ambitious survey of neo-African culture, *Muntu* (Faber, 1961), the German scholar Janheinz Jahn has argued that Césaire's purpose was far more rational and deliberate than a mere 'dive into the unconscious'. When he arranges certain words in an apparently surrealist paradox he does so in order to break their conventional association and make them anew. Thus he writes of the imprisoned hero Toussaint L'Ouverture, dying in the Jura mountains amid the snows of the Northern winter:

> What I am
> is a man alone imprisoned in
> white
> is a man alone who defies
> the white cries of white death
> (TOUSSAINT, TOUSSAINT

* From *Pigments* by L. G. Damas (G.L.M., Paris, 1937), translation by Ulli Beier.

L'OUVERTURE)
is a man who fascin-
ates the white hawk of white death
is a man alone in the ster-
ile sea of white sand
is an old darky braced against
the waters of the sky*

Against Jahn it could be argued that, although Césaire's ideology embraces Négritude, his technique is unmistakably surrealist, and to describe it as peculiarly negro is a piece of critical obscurantism. It is true that Senghor, who also began to write at this time, occasionally uses language in a rather similar way; but he does so with a characteristic rhetorical amplitude which woos the reader instead of shocking him.

Perhaps I was the light which slept upon your
forms fluid as a statue
The green light which gilded you, which made
you the Sun of my splendid night†

In Senghor's poetry all the familiar themes of Négritude appear one by one; the pervasive presence of the dead and their protective guiding influence upon the living (*In Memoriam, Night of Sine*); the devastation of ancient Africa and its culture by white Europe (*Paris in the Snow*); the harsh rigidity of the modern West and its desperate need for the complementing qualities of Africa (*New York*); the warm triumphant beauty of African woman (*You Held the Black Face*). But a poem like *Luxembourg 1939* shows another facet of Senghor, his profound love and understanding of what is great and enduring in Western achievement, his need to live in both cultures, to be what he himself calls 'a cultural mulatto'.

Many of these themes recur in the slender, exquisite

* From *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* by Aimé Césaire (Présence Africaine, Paris, 1956), pp. 45–6.

† From *D'autres chants* (published in *Éthiopiques*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 1956).

verses of Birago Diop, a contemporary of Senghor's who has spent far more of his life in Africa, working as a government official. But in the angry, stabbing lines of David Diop, killed in an air crash at the age of thirty-three, there is no room for gentle nostalgia or forgiveness. His poems move inexorably towards a triumphant affirmation. He does not *hope* for better things, he *commands* them by the power of the word, just as Agostinho Neto does from the coffee-fields of Angola.

In the Congolese poets U Tam'si and Bolamba the influence of Césaire is much more direct. Instead of the sonorous monotony of Senghor, they offer a series of intense, enigmatic images related to each other by association rather than by any perceptible string of meaning. Naturally such a technique is only occasionally successful. Yet, at their best, they both produce some memorable images, like U Tam'si's:

> My race remembers
> The taste of bronze drunk hot.

With the poets of English-speaking Africa we move to an entirely different world, one which knows little of Négritude, and generally dislikes what it knows. The dismissive comment of Mphahlele ('To us in the multi-racial communities . . . Négritude is just so much intellectual talk, a cult') can be matched by the Nigerian Wole Soyinka, who ridicules the idea of a Tiger having to proclaim his tigritude. This attitude is a trifle unfair, but its origins are not difficult to find. To begin with, the taste for literary 'movements' is much more Gallic than Anglo-Saxon, and there can be little doubt that the intellectual attitudes of the colonial powers have affected their respective former subjects profoundly. Again, Britain never pursued a policy of cultural *assimilation* but, characteristically, had no cultural policy at all. Consequently, there was far less to react *against*, emotionally and intellectually,

than in French Africa. But correspondingly, it was considerably longer before a generation of West Africans grew up who felt able to write English with real confidence and fluency. At a time when Senghor and others were already publishing in Parisian literary reviews, Nigeria and Ghana had nothing to show but a few verses strongly influenced by missionary hymns and slogans, reflecting an attitude which would make any Négritude poet see red:

> My simple fathers
> In childlike faith believed all things;
> It cost them much
> And their offspring lost a lot;
> They questioned not the lies of magic
> And fetish seemed to have some logic.*

So wrote the Nigerian Denis Osadebey only about a dozen years ago. Similar sentiments are still occasionally to be found in Nigerian poetry, which shows how thoroughly the job of *de*similation, at least, was accomplished. Here a Nigerian student, writing only two or three years ago, reflects smugly how his ancestors gibbered with superstitious terror at the mere sight of a sunrise:

> What in ancestral days was fear
> In me is grandeur;
> What in ages gone was dread,
> In me is splendour†

Other pioneer poets of English-speaking Africa were Dei-Anang of Ghana and H. Carey Thomas of Liberia. These writers show rather more respect for indigenous culture, but their handling of the theme is somewhat superficial. Thus Carey Thomas points the opposite moral from Osadebey in equally flat language:

> Be warned:
> That palefaced strangers

* Six lines from Denis Osadebey, quoted by Ulli Beier in *Black Orpheus*, No. 1.

† Four lines by J. D. Ekwere, quoted from *Nigerian Student Verse* (Ibadan, 1959).

With unhallowed feet
Profane this heritage our fathers gave.*

Recently poetry of this recognizably 'pioneer' type has begun to appear in East Africa also. The young Kikuyu poet Joe Mutiga writes of the desecration of holy ground by the plantation of new crops:

Our customs are dug up,
And put aside, like the grass
On which the dancer trod,
And foreign crops implanted;
And we pass by, eyes on the ground,
Submitting to the foreign as ours.†

Poets like these have performed a useful function by re-establishing poetry as an occupation for educated men, and their verses are often of great political and sociological interest; but their failure to penetrate the rich traditions either of English or of vernacular poetry afflicts their work with a total lack of style. An anthology of these poems would be an important and moving document in the history of African nationalism. In this anthology they are not included because they cannot be classified as 'modern', in the sense that they do not represent a fresh exploration of language.

It was not until about five years ago that a new generation of poets began to show themselves, notably in Nigeria. With the exception of Gabriel Okara, all these young poets studied at University College, Ibadan. Hence they were able to acquire a literary culture without suffering the sense of alienation and exile which afflicted the black writers gathered in Paris twenty and thirty years ago. Having grown up and been educated in a purely African environment, their work is extraordinarily free from slogans or stereotypes. They are eclectic in their choice of

* Four lines from H. Carey Thomas, quoted by Ulli Beier in *Black Orpheus*, No. 1.

† From *To the Ceremonial Mugumbo* by Joe Mutiga, quoted from *Transition*, 3 (Kampala, 1962).

THIS PAGE IS LOCKED TO FREE MEMBERS

Purchase full membership to immediately unlock this page

DELVE INTO FANTASY, MAGIC, MYTHOLOGY & FOLKLORE

Forgotten Books' Full Membership gives access to 797,885 ancient and modern, fiction and non-fiction books.

Continue

*Fair usage policy applies

imagery. This has given both freshness and weight to their language. Both, incidentally, come from areas where a great deal of fine vernacular poetry has been collected, Eweland and Zululand.

Much of the poetry from Portuguese Africa is little more than a cry of sheer agony and loss. These territories are still politically and socially in a condition from which most of Africa emerged many years ago. The tiny group of *assimilados* (about 5,000 in Angola, after over 400 years of coastal occupation) provides the principal target of government repression. Dr Agostinho Neto, for instance, was imprisoned in Portugal for over two years until his recent escape. Yet, if few of these poets can write of anything but their immediate dilemma, their work is testimony enough to the unquenchable spirit of their humanity. An exception is Valente Malangatana who, alone among the poets in this collection, is also a painter of distinction. Like the Haitian painter–poet Max Pinchinat, his imagery has great immediacy and presence, a presence which is more than visual:

> and I all fresh, fresh
> breathed gently, wrapped in my napkins.

His two poems seem to us among the most beautiful and rewarding in the whole volume.

Few writers on African poetry can resist the temptation to pontificate. It is interesting to see to what extent these generalizations can be squared with the reality of modern African writing as represented here. For a starting-point let us take a statement like this, of Senghor's:

Monotony of tone, that is what distinguishes poetry from prose, it is the seal of Négritude, the incantation which opens the way to essential things, the Forces of the Cosmos.*

In point of fact, it is only in Senghor's own work that a monotony of this kind is exhibited, and there it is only tolerable because of the splendour of his musical effects:

* *Éthiopiques*, p. 120.

Que j'écoute, dans la case enfumée que visite un
reflet d'âmes propices
Ma tête sur ton sein chaud comme un dang au sortir
du feu et fumant
Que je respire l'odeur de nos Morts, que je recueille
et redise leur voix vivante, que j'appreuve à
Vivre avant de descendre, au delà du plongeur, dans
les hautes profondeurs du sommeil.*

David Diop exhibits a certain monotony of *content*, but his movement is too fierce and swift to permit any monotony of style. Could it be that Senghor was merely vindicating his own sonority?

Again, Jahn takes Jean-Paul Sartre to task for having argued in *L'Orphée noir* that Negro poetry is 'the true revolutionary poetry of our time', and that Négritude is the voice of a particular historical moment, when the black race has given tongue to its revolt against white rule. Against this Jahn argues, somewhat primly, that neo-African poetry is not revolutionary at all, but a return to authentic tradition, and that Négritude, far from being the voice of a particular historical moment, is the style in which all African poetry must henceforth be written:

> Once for all it took the stain from Africa; it demonstrated that poetry and literature were not only possible in the African manner and out of an African attitude of mind, but that *only such poetry was legitimate* [editors' italics].†

Yet already it begins to look as though Sartre was right. In the last few years there have been signs that the wellspring of Négritude is running dry. The great period was in the forties and early fifties, and since then Césaire, Damas, and Senghor have all been notably unproductive. Birago Diop has published only one slim volume of verse in twenty years. David Diop was killed after writing only a handful of poems and before it was possible to say in what direction his style might have moved. Meanwhile the

* From *Nuit de Sine* (French text).
† *Muntu*, p. 207.

centre of poetic activity seems to have shifted from Senegal–Paris to Nigeria, where the last five years have seen a remarkable upsurge. And, as already pointed out, these young poets 'of English expression' are not merely indifferent to, but actually hostile towards, the concept of Négritude.

The answer may be that Négritude has served its purpose in giving neo-African poets a bridgehead and a point of departure. But as Africa moves into independence, the conflicts of the core of Négritude become more and more apparent. It is no coincidence that the word itself was coined by a West Indian, or that he should also have written the most extended poetic exposition of it. The situation of the black West Indian was always essentially different from that of the continental African, and has become increasingly so as Africa itself has passed back into African hands. The black man in Haiti, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Martinique, or Jamaica grew up in a permanent state of exile. He had no name, no tolerated religion, and scarcely any distinct culture of his own, yet until recently he could not expect any position of power or influence in the new mixed societies which had been built upon his labours. Without even knowing, in the vast majority of cases, from which part of Africa his ancestors came, he was obliged to build up a romantic, idealized vision of 'Guinea', a kind of heaven to which all good Negroes go when they die:

> It's the long road to Guinea
> Death takes you there.*

His dilemma has been perfectly expressed by the Cuban poet Nicolas Guillén, who finds nothing except his colour to distinguish him from those who reject him and who is therefore obliged to investigate the meaning of that colour afresh:

* From *Guinea* by Jacques Roumain, quoted from *The Poetry of the Negro* (New York, 1949).

. . . All my skin (I should have said so)
all my skin – does it really come
from that Spanish marble statue? And my
fearful voice
the harsh cry from my gorge? And all my bones
do they come from there? . . .
Are you quite sure?
Is there nothing else, only that which you wrote
that which you sealed
with a sign of wrath. . . .
Do you not see these drums in my eyes?
Do you not see these drums hammering out
two dry tears?
Have I not got an ancestor of night
with a large black mark
(blacker than the skin)
a large mark
written with a whip?
Have I got not an ancestor
from Mandingo, the Congo, Dahomey?*

One reaction to this dilemma was to plunge into a glorification of sensuality – blood, drums, rhythmic ecstasy – such as we find in a poem like *Rumba* by José Tallet:

The climax of passion, the dancers are trembling
and ecstasy presses José to the ground.
The Bongó is thundering and in a mad whirl
the daemon has broken Tomasa's limbs.
Piqui-tiqui-pan, piqui-tiqui-pan!
Piqui-tiqui-pan, piqui-tiqui-pan!
The blackish Tomasa now falls to the ground
and down also falls Ché Encarnación.
there they are rolling, convulsing, and twitching,
with whirling drum and raging Bongó
the rumba now fades with con-con-co-mabó!
And pa-ca, pa-ca, pa-ca, pa-ca!
Pam! Pam! Pam!†

* Akanji's translation of *The Name* in *Black Orpheus*, No. 7.

† Akanji's translation of *Rumba* in *Black Orpheus*, No. 7.

It was these attitudes of alienation and protest which gave rise to the literary movement of Negrismo in Cuba during the late twenties, and to a similar movement in Haiti at about the same time. And these same Caribbean movements are the direct ancestors of Négritude.

It is interesting that Senghor's great anthology of 1948, the *chef d'œuvre* of Négritude, should contain the work of only three poets from continental Africa, and those three all from Senegal. For it was in Senegal that a handful of African intellectuals were treated to the full rigours of *assimilation*, and later to those of exile – albeit a voluntary exile in Paris. Naturally, the passionate chords of Césaire found an echo in their hearts. Naturally, too, they found less echo in the hearts of poets brought up and educated in the bosom of a functioning African society which, even at the full tide of colonialism, never truly resembled the Caribbean situation.

This is what makes it so dangerous for critics to try and establish a literary orthodoxy, in the manner of Jahn in *Muntu*:

> Whether the work of an author whatever his colour, belongs to Western or African culture, depends on whether we find in it those criteria of African culture which we have set forth in the preceding chapters.*

Thus Jahn establishes himself as the keeper of the narrow gate which leads to the African Parnassus. Fortunately, as the following pages show, African poetry is already too rich and various to follow one path only.

Probably the nearest thing to an acceptable generalization about African poetry has been made by Senghor:

> The word here is more than the image, it is the *analagous* image, without even the help of metaphor or comparison. It is enough to name the thing, and the sense appears beneath the sign.†

* *Muntu*, p. 195.
† *Éthiopiques*, p. 108.

This process is essentially one of verbal magic: the poet-magus *makes* by naming. It undoubtedly lies at the root of all poetry, but it is probably closer to the surface of the poet's mind in Africa than elsewhere because of the recent arrival of literacy in the area, and because he inhabits a society where a vast body of traditional ritual, dance, song, poetry, and story is still alive. In a recent article on Ife, William Fagg and Frank Willett have argued that, because he worked in perishable materials, the African carver was forced continually to renew his communion with the gods, to 'make' them afresh. A parallel attitude is expressed by Senghor, who is happiest when his poetry is sung to music in the traditional style and so passes into the mainstream of tradition. In discussing poetic diction he writes:

> A poem is like a passage of jazz, where the execution is just as important as the text. . . . I still think that the poem is not complete until it is sung, words and music together.*

And in *Congo* he expresses contempt for the 'permanence' of ink, as compared with the true permanence of rhythmic recreation:

> Oho! Congo oho! to beat out your great name on the
> waters on the rivers on all memory
> May I move the voice of the kòras Koyaté. The scribe's
> ink has no memory.†

In compiling this anthology, we have imposed certain limitations upon ourselves. We have confined ourselves to black writers and to texts originally composed in one or other of the European languages spoken in Africa. The first restriction is a matter of definition – African. A collection of this title might logically include the work of all good poets resident in Africa or of African background, whether black, coloured, Indian, or white. This would imply the inclusion of such well-anthologized poets as Roy Campbell, William Plomer, and Guy Butler, as well as the

* *Éthiopiques*, pp. 121 and 123.
† From *Congo*, published in *Éthiopiques*.

various Africaans writers. It seemed to us that such a collection would lack the more particular significance to be found in an anthology of poetry by black Africans, who at least share the experience of a historic awakening and have not hitherto been assembled for study in a convenient form. The second limitation is a matter of feasibility. There is poetry awaiting collection in hundreds of African vernaculars. But how is one to make a critical selection without being fully familiar with all the vernaculars concerned? How much of this poetry could be legitimately regarded as 'modern'? And how, having made a selection, could adequate translations be secured? The present dominance of European languages in African creative writing may be temporary, but there is no denying its existence or the strength of the factors making towards it.

Our concept of the modern is perhaps more difficult to define. In part it is simply a matter of quality; hence the exclusion of the rather tractarian verse of the West African pioneers. In part it is a matter of the poets' awareness of the modern idiom in European and American poetry. It is this awareness that enables them to use their respective languages without distracting archaism and in a way that appeals instantly to the contemporary ear.

The most important limitation we imposed was the attempt to set a high standard and to include only those poems which have other claims to attention than the mere fact of having been written by Africans. The cause of literature has been poorly served already by uncritical selection. We thought it indefensible to include bad poems for the sake of keeping everyone happy. Furthermore, anthologies based on a sense of duty rather than of pleasure are always unreadable.

The result of this policy is that some countries, such as Senegal and Nigeria, are well represented, while others do not appear at all. This is an interesting fact in itself; part of the function of an anthology of this kind is to bring out creative strength where it exists. We believe that the

THIS PAGE IS LOCKED TO FREE MEMBERS

Purchase full membership to immediately unlock this page

Get Smart

Over 2,000 years of human knowledge in 797,885 volumes

Instant access $8.99/month

Continue

*Fair usage policy applies

Madagascar

Jean-Joseph Rabéarivelo

Four poems from *Traduits de la nuit*

2

What invisible rat
come from the walls of night
gnaws at the milky cake of the moon?
Tomorrow morning,
when it has gone,
there will be bleeding marks of teeth.

Tomorrow morning
those who have drunk all night
and those who have abandoned their cards,
blinking at the moon
will stammer out:
'Whose is that sixpence
that rolls over the green table?'
'Ah!' one of them will add,
'our friend has lost everything
and killed himself!'

And all will snigger
and, staggering, will fall.
The moon will no longer be there:
the rat will have carried her into his hole.

3

The hide of the black cow is stretched,
stretched but not set to dry,
stretched in the sevenfold shadow.

But who has killed the black cow,
dead without having lowed, dead without having roared,
dead without having once been chased
over that prairie flowered with stars?

She who calves in the far half of the sky.

Stretched is the hide
on the sounding-box of the wind
that is sculptured by the spirits of sleep.

And the drum is ready
when the new-born calf,
her horns crowned with spear grass
leaps
and grazes the grass of the hills.

It reverberates there
and its incantations will become dreams
until the moment when the black cow lives again,
white and pink
before a river of light.

4

She
whose eyes are prisms of sleep
and whose lids are heavy with dreams,
she whose feet are planted in the sea
and whose shiny hands appear
full of corals and blocks of shining salt.

She will put them in little heaps beside a misty gulf
and sell them to naked sailors
whose tongues have been cut out,
until the rain begins to fall.

Then she will disappear
and we shall only see
her hair spread by the wind
like a bunch of seaweed unravelling,
and perhaps some tasteless grains of sált.

17

The black glassmaker
whose countless eyeballs none has ever seen,
whose shoulders none has overlooked,
that slave all clothed in pearls of glass,
who is strong as Atlas
and who carries the seven skies on his head,
one would think that the vast river of clouds might carry
him away,
the river in which his loincloth is already wet.

A thousand particles of glass
fall from his hands
but rebound towards his brow
shattered by the mountains
where the winds are born.

And you are witness of his daily suffering
and of his endless task;
you watch his thunder-riddled agony
until the battlements of the East re-echo
the conches of the sea –
but you pity him no more
and do not even remember that his sufferings begin again
each time the sun capsizes.

Cactus
(from Presque-songes)

That multitude of moulded hands
holding out flowers to the azure sky
that multitude of fingerless hands
unshaken by the wind
they say that a hidden source
wells from their untainted palms
they say that this inner source
refreshes thousands of cattle
and numberless tribes, wandering tribes
in the frontiers of the South.

Fingerless hands, springing from a source,
Moulded hands, crowning the sky.

Here, when the flanks of the City were still as green
as moonbeams glancing from the forests,
when they still left bare the hills of Iarive
crouching like bulls upthrust,
it was upon rocks too steep even for goats
that they hid, to protect their sources,
these lepers sprouting flowers.

Enter the cave from which they came
if you seek the origin of the sickness which ravages them –
origin more shrouded than the evening
and further than the dawn –
but you will know no more than I.
The blood of the earth, the sweat of the stone,
and the sperm of the wind,
which flow together in these palms
have melted their fingers
and replaced them with golden flowers.

THIS PAGE IS LOCKED TO FREE MEMBERS

Purchase full membership to immediately unlock this page

DELVE INTO FANTASY, MAGIC, MYTHOLOGY & FOLKLORE

Forgotten Books' Full Membership gives access to 797,885 ancient and modern, fiction and non-fiction books.

Continue

*Fair usage policy applies

Such this famous smoker
who took tobacco
when there was no more hemp to burn.
A foot of hemp?
– Sprung in Andringitra,
spent in Ankaratra,
no more than cinders to us.
False flattery
stimulates love a little
but the blade has two edges;
why change what is natural?
– If I have made you sad
look at yourself in the water of repentance,
you will decipher there a word I have left.
Good-bye, whirling puzzle,
I give you my blessing:
wrestle with the crocodile,
here are your victuals and three water-lily flowers
for the way is long.

Song of a Common Lover

Don't love me, my sweet,
like your shadow
for shadows fade at evening
and I want to keep you
right up to cockcrow;
nor like pepper
which makes the belly hot
for then I couldn't take you
when I'm hungry;
nor like a pillow
for we'd be together in the hours of sleep
but scarcely meet by day;
nor like rice
for once swallowed you think no more of it;

nor like soft speeches
for they quickly vanish;
nor like honey,
sweet indeed but too common.
Love me like a beautiful dream,
your life in the night,
my hope in the day;
like a piece of money,
ever with me on earth,
and for the great journey
a faithful comrade;
like a calabash,
intact, for drawing water;
in pieces, bridges for my guitar.

Senegal

ZENCEST

Léopold Sédar Senghor

In Memoriam

It is Sunday.
I fear the crowd of my brothers with stony faces.
From my tower of glass filled with pain, the nagging Ancestors
I gaze at roofs and hills in the fog
In the silence – the chimneys are grave and bare.
At their feet sleep my dead, all my dreams are dust
All my dreams, the liberal blood spills all along the streets, mixing with the blood of the butcheries.
And now, from this observatory as from a suburb
I watch my dreams float vaguely through the streets, lie at the hills' feet
Like the guides of my race on the banks of Gambia or Saloum,
Now of the Seine, at the feet of these hills.
Let me think of my dead!
Yesterday it was Toussaint, the solemn anniversary of the sun
And no remembrance in any cemetery.
Ah, dead ones who have always refused to die, who have known how to fight death
By Seine or Sine, and in my fragile veins pushed the invincible blood,
Protect my dreams as you have made your sons, wanderers on delicate feet.
Oh Dead, protect the roofs of Paris in the Sunday fog

The roofs which guard my dead
That from the perilous safety of my tower I may descend
to the streets
To join my brothers with blue eyes
With hard hands.

Night of Sine

Woman, rest on my brow your balsam hands, your hands
gentler than fur.
The tall palmtrees swinging in the nightwind
Hardly rustle. Not even cradlesongs.
The rhythmic silence rocks us.
Listen to its song, listen to the beating of our dark blood,
listen
To the beating of the dark pulse of Africa in the mist of
lost villages.
Now the tired moon sinks towards its bed of slack
water,
Now the peals of laughter even fall asleep, and the bards
themselves
Dandle their heads like children on the backs of their
mothers.
Now the feet of the dancers grow heavy and heavy grows
the tongue of the singers.
This is the hour of the stars and of the night that dreams
And reclines on this hill of clouds, draped in her long
gown of milk.
The roofs of the houses gleam gently. What are they telling
so confidently to the stars?
Inside the hearth is extinguished in the intimacy of bitter
and sweet scents.
Woman, light the lamp of clear oil, and let the children in
bed talk about their ancestors, like their parents.
Listen to the voice of the ancients of Elissa. Like we,
exiled,

THIS PAGE IS LOCKED TO FREE MEMBERS

Purchase full membership to immediately unlock this page

Get Smart

Over 2,000 years of human knowledge in 797,885 volumes

Instant access $8.99/month

Continue

*Fair usage policy applies

I watch the leaves fall into the shelters, into the ditches,
into the trenches
Where the blood of a generation flows
Europe is burying the yeast of nations and the hope of
newer races.

Totem

I must hide him in my innermost veins
The Ancestor whose stormy hide is shot with lightning and
thunder
My animal protector, I must hide him
That I may not break the barriers of scandal:
He is my faithful blood that demands fidelity
Protecting my naked pride against
Myself and the scorn of luckier races.

Paris in the Snow

Lord, you visited Paris on the day of your birth
Because it had become paltry and bad.
You purified it with incorruptible cold,
The white death.
This morning even the factory funnels hoisted in harmony
The white flags.
'Peace to all men of good will.'
Lord, you have offered the divided world, divided Europe,
The snow of peace.
And the rebels fired their fourteen hundred cannons
Against the mountains of your peace.
Lord, I have accepted your white cold that burns worse
than salt.
And now my heart melts like snow in the sun.
And I forget

The white hands that loaded the guns that destroyed the
kingdoms,
The hands that whipped the slaves and that whipped you
The dusty hands that slapped you, the white powdered
hands that slapped me
The sure hands that pushed me into solitude and hatred
The white hands that felled the high forest that dominated
Africa,
That felled the Sara, erect and firm in the heart of Africa,
beautiful like the first men that were created by your
brown hands.
They felled the virgin forest to turn into railway sleepers.
They felled Africa's forest in order to save civilization that
was lacking in men.
Lord, I can still not abandon this last hate, I know it, the
hatred of diplomats who show their long teeth
And who will barter with black flesh tomorrow.
My heart, oh lord, has melted like the snow on the roofs of
Paris
In the sun of your Goodness,
It is kind to my enemies, my brothers with the snowless
white hands,
Also because of the hands of dew that lie on my burning
cheeks at night.

Blues

The spring has swept the ice from all my frozen rivers
My young sap trembles at the first caresses along the
tender bark.
But see how in the midst of July I am blinder than the
Arctic winter!
My wings beat and break against the barriers of heaven
No ray pierces the deaf vault of my bitterness.
What sign is there to find? What key to strike?
And how can god be reached by hurling javelins?

Royal Summer of the distant South, you will come too
late, in a hateful September!
In what book can I find the thrill of your reverberation?
And on the pages of what book, on what impossible lips
taste your delirious love?

The impatient fit leaves me. Oh! the dull beat of the rain
on the leaves!
Just play me your 'Solitude', Duke, till I cry myself to
sleep.

The Dead

They are lying out there beside the captured roads, all
along the roads of disaster
Elegant poplars, statues of sombre gods draped in their
long cloaks of gold,
Senegalese prisoners darkly stretched on the soil of France.

In vain they have cut off your laughter, in vain the darker
flower of your flesh,
You are the flower in its first beauty amid a naked absence
of flowers
Black flower with its grave smile, diamond of immemorial
ages.
You are the slime and plasma of the green spring of the
world
Of the first couple you are the flesh, the ripe belly the
milkiness
You are the sacred increase of the bright gardens of
paradise

And the invincible forest, victorious over fire and thunder-
bolt.
The great song of your blood will vanquish machines and
cannons
Your throbbing speech evasions and lies.

No hate in your soul void of hatred, no cunning in your
soul void of cunning.
O Black Martyrs immortal race, let me speak the words of
pardon.

Prayer to Masks

Masks! Oh Masks!
Black mask, red mask, you black and white masks,
Rectangular masks through whom the spirit breathes,
I greet you in silence!
And you too, my pantherheaded ancestor.
You guard this place, that is closed to any feminine laugh-
ter, to any mortal smile.
You purify the air of eternity, here where I breathe the air
of my fathers.
Masks of maskless faces, free from dimples and wrinkles,
You have composed this image, this my face that bends
over the altar of white paper.
In the name of your image, listen to me!
Now while the Africa of despotism is dying – it is the agony
of a pitiable princess
Just like Europe to whom she is connected through the
navel,
Now turn your immobile eyes towards your children who
have been called
And who sacrifice their lives like the poor man his last
garment
So that hereafter we may cry 'here' at the rebirth of the
world being the leaven that the white flour needs.
For who else would teach rhythm to the world that has
died of machines and cannons?
For who else should ejaculate the cry of joy, that arouses
the dead and the wise in a new dawn?
Say, who else could return the memory of life to men with
a torn hope?

They call us cotton heads, and coffee men, and oily men,
They call us men of death.
But we are the men of the dance whose feet only gain
power when they beat the hard soil.

.

Visit

I dream in the intimate semi-darkness of an afternoon.
I am visited by the fatigues of the day,
The deceased of the year, the souvenirs of the decade,
Like the procession of the dead in the village on the horizon
of the shallow sea.
It is the same sun bedewed with illusions,
The same sky unnerved by hidden presences,
The same sky feared by those who have a reckoning with
the dead.
And suddenly my dead draw near to me. . . .

All Day Long

All day long, over the long straight rails
Like an inflexible will over the endless sands
Across parched Cayor and Baol where the baobabs twist
their arms in torment
All day long, all along the line
Past the same little stations, past black girls jostling like
birds at the gates of schools
All day long, sorely rattled by the iron train and dusty and
hoarse
Behold me seeking to forget Europe in the pastoral heart
of Sine!

In what Tempestuous Night

What dark tempestuous night has been hiding your face?
And what claps of thunder frighten you from the bed
When the fragile walls of my breast tremble?
I shudder with cold, trapped in the dew of the clearing.
O, I am lost in the treacherous paths of the forest.
Are these creepers or snakes that entangle my feet?
I slip into the mudhole of fear and my cry is suffocated in a watery rattle.
But when shall I hear your voice again, happy luminous morn?
When shall I recognize myself again in the laughing mirror of eyes, that are large like windows?
And what sacrifice will pacify the white mask of the goddess?
Perhaps the blood of chickens or goats, or the worthless blood in my veins?
Or the prelude of my song, the ablution of my pride?

Give me propitious words.

New York

(*for jazz orchestra: trumpet solo*)

I

New York! At first I was confused by your beauty, by those great golden long-legged girls.
So shy at first before your blue metallic eyes, your frosted smile
So shy. And the anguish in the depths of skyscraper streets
Lifting eyes hawkhooded to the sun's eclipse.
Sulphurous your light and livid the towers with heads that thunderbolt the sky
The skyscrapers which defy the storms with muscles of steel and stone-glazed hide.
But two weeks on the bare sidewalks of Manhattan

– At the end of the third week the fever seizes you with the
pounce of a leopard
Two weeks without rivers or fields, all the birds of the air
Falling sudden and dead on the high ashes of flat rooftops.
No smile of a child blooms, his hand refreshed in my hand,
No mother's breast, but only nylon legs. Legs and breasts
that have no sweat nor smell.
No tender word for there are no lips, only artificial hearts
paid for in hard cash
And no book where wisdom may be read. The painter's
palette blossoms with crystals of coral.
Nights of insomnia oh nights of Manhattan! So agitated
by flickering lights, while motor-horns howl of empty
hours
And while dark waters carry away hygienic loves, like
rivers flooded with the corpses of children.

2

Now is the time of signs and reckonings
New York! Now is the time of manna and hyssop.
You must but listen to the trombones of God, let your
heart beat in the rhythm of blood, your blood.
I saw in Harlem humming with noise with stately colours
and flamboyant smells
– It was teatime at the house of the seller of pharmaceutical
products –
I saw them preparing the festival of night for escape from
the day.
I proclaim night more truthful than the day.
It was the pure hour when in the streets God makes the
life that goes back beyond memory spring up
All the amphibious elements shining like suns.
Harlem Harlem! Now I saw Harlem! A green breeze of
corn springs up from the pavements ploughed by the
naked feet of dancers
Bottoms waves of silk and sword-blade breasts, water-lily
ballets and fabulous masks.

THIS PAGE IS LOCKED TO FREE MEMBERS

Purchase full membership to immediately unlock this page

DELVE INTO FANTASY, MAGIC, MYTHOLOGY & FOLKLORE

Forgotten Books' Full Membership gives access to 797,885 ancient and modern, fiction and non-fiction books.

Continue

*Fair usage policy applies

SENEGAL

You Held the Black Face
(for Khalam)

You held the black face of the warrior between your
hands
Which seemed with fateful twilight luminous.
From the hill I watched the sunset in the bays of your
eyes.
When shall I see my land again, the pure horizon of your
face?
When shall I sit at the table of your dark breasts?
The nest of sweet decisions lies in the shade.
I shall see different skies and different eyes,
And shall drink from the sources of other lips, fresher than
lemons,
I shall sleep under the roofs of other hair, protected from
storms.
But every year, when the rum of spring kindles the veins
afresh,
I shall mourn anew my home, and the rain of your eyes
over the thirsty savannah.

I will Pronounce your Name
(for Tama)

I will pronounce your name, Naëtt, I will declaim you,
Naëtt!
Naëtt, your name is mild like cinnamon, it is the fragrance
in which the lemon grove sleeps,
Naëtt, your name is the sugared clarity of blooming coffee
trees
And it resembles the savannah, that blossoms forth under
the masculine ardour of the midday sun.
Name of dew, fresher than shadows of tamarind,
Fresher even than the short dusk, when the heat of the day
is silenced.

Naëtt, that is the dry tornado, the hard clap of lightning
Naëtt, coin of gold, shining coal, you my night, my sun!
I am your hero, and now I have become your sorcerer, in order to pronounce your names.
Princess of Elissa, banished from Futa on the fateful day.

Be not Amazed

Be not amazed beloved, if sometimes my song grows dark,
If I exchange the lyrical reed for the Khalam or the tama
And the green scent of the ricefields, for the swiftly galloping war drums.
I hear the threats of ancient deities, the furious cannonade of the god.
Oh, tomorrow perhaps, the purple voice of your bard will be silent for ever.
That is why my rhythm becomes so fast, that the fingers bleed on the Khalam.
Perhaps, beloved, I shall fall tomorrow, on a restless earth
Lamenting your sinking eyes, and the dark tom-tom of the mortars below.
And you will weep in the twilight for the glowing voice that sang your black beauty.

David Diop

Listen Comrades

Listen comrades of the struggling centuries
To the keen clamour of the Negro from Africa to the Americas
They have killed Mamba
As they killed the seven of Martinsville
Or the Madagascan down there in the pale light on the prisons
He held in his look comrades
The warm faith of a heart without anguish
And his smile despite agony
Despite the wounds of his broken body
Kept the bright colours of a bouquet of hope
It is true that they have killed Mamba with his white hairs
Who ten times poured forth for us milk and light
I feel his mouth on my dreams
And the peaceful tremor of his breast
And I am lost again
Like a plant torn from the maternal bosom
But no
For there rings out higher than my sorrows
Purer than the morning where the wild beast wakes
The cry of a hundred people smashing their cells
And my blood long held in exile
The blood they hoped to snare in a circle of words
Rediscovers the fervour that scatters the mists
Listen comrades of the struggling centuries

To the keen clamour of the Negro from Africa to the Americas
It is the sign of the dawn
The sign of brotherhood which comes to nourish the dreams of men.

Your Presence

In your presence I rediscovered my name
My name that was hidden under the pain of separation
I rediscovered the eyes no longer veiled with fever
And your laughter like a flame piercing the shadows
Has revealed Africa to me beyond the snows of yesterday
Ten years my love
With days of illusions and shattered ideas
And sleep made restless with alcohol
The suffering that burdens today with the taste of tomorrow
And that turns love into a boundless river
In your presence I have rediscovered the memory of my blood
And necklaces of laughter hung around our days
Days sparkling with ever new joys.

The Renegade

My brother you flash your teeth in response to every hypocrisy
My brother with gold-rimmed glasses
You give your master a blue-eyed faithful look
My poor brother in immaculate evening dress
Screaming and whispering and pleading in the parlours of condescension
We pity you
Your country's burning sun is nothing but a shadow

On your serene 'civilized' brow
And the thought of your grandmother's hut
Brings blushes to your face that is bleached
By years of humiliation and bad conscience
And while you trample on the bitter red soil of Africa
Let these words of anguish keep time with your
restless step –
Oh I am lonely so lonely here.

Africa

Africa my Africa
Africa of proud warriors in ancestral savannahs
Africa of whom my grandmother sings
On the banks of the distant river
I have never known you
But your blood flows in my veins
Your beautiful black blood that irrigates the fields
The blood of your sweat
The sweat of your work
The work of your slavery
The slavery of your children
Africa tell me Africa
Is this you this back that is bent
This back that breaks under the weight of humiliation
This back trembling with red scars
And saying yes to the whip under the midday sun
But a grave voice answers me
Impetuous son that tree young and strong
That tree there
In splendid loneliness amidst white and faded flowers
That is Africa your Africa
That grows again patiently obstinately
And its fruit gradually acquire
The bitter taste of liberty.

The Vultures

In those days
When civilization kicked us in the face
When holy water slapped our cringing brows
The vultures built in the shadow of their talons
The bloodstained monument of tutelage
In those days
There was painful laughter on the metallic hell of the
ródads
And the monotonous rhythm of the paternoster
Drowned the howling on the plantations
O the bitter memories of extorted kisses
Of promises broken at the point of a gun
Of foreigners who did not seem human
Who knew all the books but did not know love
But we whose hands fertilize the womb of the earth
In spite of your songs of pride
In spite of the desolate villages of torn Africa
Hope was preserved in us as in a fortress
And from the mines of Swaziland to the factories of
Europe
Spring will be reborn under our bright steps.

To a Black Dancer

Negress my warm rumour of Africa
My land of mystery and my fruit of reason
You are the dance by the naked joy of your smile
By the offering of your breasts and secret powers
You are the dance by the golden tales of marriage nights
By new tempos and more secular rhythms
Negress repeated triumph of dreams and stars
Passive mistress to the koras' assault
You are the dance of giddyness
By the magic of loins restarting the world
You are the dance

And the myths burn around me
Around me the wigs of learning
In great fires of joy in the heaven of your steps
You are the dance
And burn false gods in your vertical flame
You are the face of the initiate
Sacrificing his childhood before the tree-god
You are the idea of All and the voice of the Ancient
Gravely rocketed against our fears
You are the Word which explodes
In showers of light upon the shores of oblivion.

Nigger Tramp

You who move like a battered old dream
A dream transpierced by the blades of the mistral
By what bitter ways
By what muddy wanderings of accepted suffering
By what caravels drawing from isle to isle
The curtains of Negro blood torn from Guinea
Have you carried your old coat of thorns
To the foreign cemetery where you read the sky
I see in your eyes the drooping halts of despair
And dawn restarting the cottonfields and mines
I see Soundiata the forgotten
And Chaka the invincible
Fled to the seabed with the tales of silk and fire
I see all that
Martial music sounding the call to murder
And bellies that burst open amid snowy landscapes
To comfort the fear crouched in the entrails of cities
O my old Negro harvester of unknown lands
Lands of spice where everyone could live
What have they done with the dawn that lifted on your brow
With your bright stones and sabres of gold

THIS PAGE IS LOCKED TO FREE MEMBERS

Purchase full membership to immediately unlock this page

Get Smart

Over 2,000 years of human knowledge in 797,885 volumes

Instant access $8.99/month

Continue

*Fair usage policy applies

Birago Diop

D*iptych*

The Sun hung by a thread

In the depths of the Calabash dyed indigo
Boils the great Pot of Day.
Fearful of the approach of the Daughters of fire
The Shadow squats at the feet of the faithful.
The savannah is bright and harsh
All is sharp, forms and colours.
But in the anguished Silences made by Rumours
Of tiny sounds, neither hollow nor shrill,
Rises a ponderous Mystery,
A Mystery muffled and formless
Which surrounds and terrifies us.

The dark Loincloth pierced with nails of fire
Spread out on the Earth covers the bed of Night.
Fearful at the approach of the Daughters of shadow
The dog howls, the horse neighs
The Man crouches deep in his house.
The savannah is dark,
All is black, forms and colours
And in the anguished Silences made by Rumours
Of tiny sounds infinite or hollow or sharp
The tangled Paths of the Mystery
Slowly reveal themselves
For those who set out
And for those who return.

Omen

A naked sun – a yellow sun
A sun all naked at early dawn
Pours waves of gold over the bank
Of the river of yellow.

A naked sun – a white sun
A sun all naked and white
Pours waves of silver
Over the river of white.

A naked sun – a red sun
A sun all naked and red
Pours waves of red blood
Over the river of red.

Vanity

If we tell, gently, gently
All that we shall one day have to tell,
Who then will hear our voices without laughter,
Sad complaining voices of beggars
Who indeed will hear them without laughter?

If we cry roughly of our torments
Ever increasing from the start of things,
What eyes will watch our large mouths
Shaped by the laughter of big children
What eyes will watch our large mouths?

What heart will listen to our clamouring?
What ear to our pitiful anger
Which grows in us like a tumour
In the black depth of our plaintive throats?

When our Dead come with their Dead
When they have spoken to us with their clumsy voices;
Just as our ears were deaf

To their cries, to their wild appeals
Just as our ears were deaf
They have left on the earth their cries,
In the air, on the water, where they have traced their signs
For us, blind deaf and unworthy Sons
Who see nothing of what they have made
In the air, on the water, where they have traced their signs.

And since we did not understand our dead
Since we have never listened to their cries
If we weep, gently, gently
If we cry roughly of our torments
What heart will listen to our clamouring,
What ear to our sobbing hearts?

Ball

A scroll of blue, an exquisite thought
Moves upwards in a secret accord
And the gentle pink explosion the shade filters
Drowns a woman's perfume in a heavy regret.

The languorous lament of the saxophone
Counts a string of troubles and vague promises
And, jagged or monotonous, its raucous cry
Sometimes awakes a desire I had thought dead.

Stop jazz, you scan the sobs and tears
That jealous hearts keep only to themselves.
Stop your scrap-iron din. Your uproar
Seems like a huge complaint where consent is born.

Viaticum

In one of the three pots
the three pots to which on certain evenings
the happy souls return
the serene breath of the ancestors,

the ancestors who were men,
the forefathers who were wise,
Mother wetted three fingers,
three fingers of her left hand:
the thumb, the index and the next;
I too wetted three fingers,
three fingers of my right hand:
the thumb, the index and the next.

With her three fingers red with blood,
with dog's blood,
with bull's blood,
with goat's blood,
Mother touched me three times.
She touched my forehead with her thumb,
With her index my left breast
And my navel with her middle finger.
I too held my fingers red with blood,
with dog's blood,
with bull's blood,
with goat's blood.
I held my three fingers to the winds
to the winds of the North, to the winds of the Levant,
to the winds of the South, to the winds of the setting sun;
and I raised my three fingers towards the Moon,
towards the full Moon, the Moon full and naked
when she rested deep in the largest pot.
Afterwards I plunged my three fingers in the sand
in the sand that had grown cold.
Then Mother said, 'Go into the world, go!
They will follow your steps in life.'

Since then I go
I follow the pathways
the pathways and roads
beyond the sea and even farther,
beyond the sea and beyond the beyond;

And whenever I approach the wicked,
the Men with black hearts,
whenever I approach the envious,
the Men with black hearts
before me moves the Breath of the Ancestors.

Gambia

THIS PAGE IS LOCKED TO FREE MEMBERS

Purchase full membership to immediately unlock this page

DELVE INTO FANTASY, MAGIC, MYTHOLOGY & FOLKLORE

Forgotten Books' Full Membership gives access to 797,885 ancient and modern, fiction and non-fiction books.

Continue

*Fair usage policy applies

Song

Clawed green-eyed
Feline of night
Palsy-breasted
Selling old boot
On wet pavement
In hour-glass baskets
Coconut bellied
Unyielding copra
Gland exhausted
Whore fatigued
Worm-tunnelled sod
Prostituted fruit of Eve
Edging the Park trees
Like dancing Caterpillars
In folded leaves
Softened by Social Conscience
Hounded by Prudes
Friend of the falling star
Victim of the lonely bed.

We have Come Home

We have come home
From the bloodless war
With sunken hearts
Our boots full of pride –
From the true massacre of the soul
When we have asked
'What does it cost
To be loved and left alone?'

We have come home,
Bringing the pledge
Which is written in rainbow colours
Across the sky – for burial

But it is not the time
To lay wreaths
For yesterday's crimes
Night threatens
Time dissolves
And there is no acquaintance
With tomorrow
The gurgling drums
Echo the star
The forest howls –
And between the trees
The dark sun appears.

We have come home
When the dawn falters
Singing songs of other lands
The Death March
Violating our ears
Knowing all our lore and tears
Determined by the spinning coin.

We have come home
To the green foothills
To drink from the cry
Of warm and mellow birdsong.
To the hot beaches
Where boats go out to sea
Threshing the ocean's harvest
And the harassing, plunging
gliding gulls shower kisses on the waves.

We have come home
Where through the lightning flash
And thundering rain
The Pestilence, the drought
The soddēn spirit
Lingers on the sandy road

Supporting the tortured remnants
Of the flesh
That spirit which asks no favour
Of the world
But to have dignity.

Ghana

Kwesi Brew

A Plea for Mercy

We have come to your shrine to worship –
We the sons of the land.
The naked cowherd has brought
The cows safely home,
And stands silent with his bamboo flute
Wiping the rain from his brow;
As the birds brood in their nests
Awaiting the dawn with unsung melodies;
The shadows crowd on the shores
Pressing their lips against the bosom of the sea;
The peasants home from their labours
Sit by their log fires
Telling tales of long ago.
Why should we the sons of the land
Plead unheeded before your shrine,
When our hearts are full of song
And our lips tremble with sadness?
The little firefly vies with the star,
The log fire with the sun
The water in the calabash
With the mighty Volta.
But we have come in tattered penury
Begging at the door of a Master.

The Search

The past
Is but the cinders
Of the present;
The future
The smoke
That escaped
Into the cloud-bound sky.

Be gentle, be kind my beloved
For words become memories,
And memories tools
In the hands of jesters.
When wise men become silent,
It is because they have read
The palms of Christ
In the face of the Buddha.

So look not for wisdom
And guidance
In their speech, my beloved.
Let the same fire
Which chastened their tongues
Into silence,
Teach us – teach us!

The rain came down,
When you and I slept away
The night's burden of our passions;
Their new-found wisdom
In quick lightning flashes
Revealed the truth
That they had been
The slaves of fools.

THIS PAGE IS LOCKED TO FREE MEMBERS

Purchase full membership to immediately unlock this page

Get Smart

Over 2,000 years of human knowledge in 797,885 volumes

Instant access $8.99/month

Continue

*Fair usage policy applies

G. Awoonor-Williams

Songs of Sorrow

Dzogbese Lisa has treated me thus
It has led me among the sharps of the forest
Returning is not possible
And going forward is a great difficulty
The affairs of this world are like the chameleon faeces
Into which I have stepped
When I clean it cannot go.*

I am on the world's extreme corner,
I am not sitting in the row with the eminent
But those who are lucky
Sit in the middle and forget
I am on the world's extreme corner
I can only go beyond and forget.

My people, I have been somewhere
If I turn here, the rain beats me
If I turn there the sun burns me
The firewood of this world
Is for only those who can take heart
That is why not all can gather it.
The world is not good for anybody
But you are so happy with your fate;
Alas! the travellers are back
All covered with debt.

* Colloquial: It [the faeces] will not go [come off].

Something has happened to me
The things so great that I cannot weep;
I have no sons to fire the gun when I die
And no daughters to wail when I close my mouth
I have wandered on the wilderness
The great wilderness men call life
The rain has beaten me,
And the sharp stumps cut as keen as knives
I shall go beyond and rest.
I have no kin and no brother,
Death has made war upon our house;
And Kpeti's great household is no more,
Only the broken fence stands;
And those who dared not look in his face
Have come out as men.
How well their pride is with them.
Let those gone before take note
They have treated their offspring badly.
What is the wailing for?
Somebody is dead. Agosu himself
Alas! a snake has bitten me
My right arm is broken,
And the tree on which I lean is fallen.

Agosu if you go tell them,
Tell Nyidevu, Kpeti, and Kove
That they have done us evil;
Tell them their house is falling
And the trees in the fence
Have been eaten by termites;
That the martels curse them.
Ask them why they idle there
While we suffer, and eat sand,
And the crow and the vulture
Hover always above our broken fences
And strangers walk over our portion.

GHANA

Song of War

I shall sleep in white calico;
War has come upon the sons of men
And I shall sleep in calico;
Let the boys go forward,
Kpli and his people should go forward;
Let the white man's guns boom,
We are marching forward;
We all shall sleep in calico.

When we start, the ground shall shake;
The war is within our very huts;
Cowards should fall back
And live at home with the women;
They who go near our wives
While we are away in battle
Shall lose their calabashes when we come.

Where has it been heard before
That a snake has bitten a child
In front of its own mother;
The war is upon us
It is within our very huts
And the sons of men shall fight it
Let the white man's guns boom
And its smoke cover us
We are fighting them to die.

We shall die on the battlefield
We shall like death at no other place,
Our guns shall die with us
And our sharp knives shall perish with us
We shall die on the battlefield.

The Sea Eats the Land at Home

At home the sea is in the town,
Running in and out of the cooking places,
Collecting the firewood from the hearths
And sending it back at night;
The sea eats the land at home.
It came one day at the dead of night,
Destroying the cement walls,
And carried away the fowls,
The cooking-pots and the ladles,
The sea eats the land at home;
It is a sad thing to hear the wails,
And the mourning shouts of the women,
Calling on all the gods they worship,
To protect them from the angry sea.
Aku stood outside where her cooking-pot stood,
With her two children shivering from the cold,
Her hands on her breast,
Weeping mournfully.
Her ancestors have neglected her,
Her gods have deserted her,
It was a cold Sunday morning,
The storm was raging,
Goats and fowls were struggling in the water,
The angry water of the cruel sea;
The lap-lapping of the bark water at the shore,
And above the sobs and the deep and low moans,
Was the eternal hum of the living sea.
It has taken away their belongings
Adena has lost the trinkets which
Were her dowry and her joy,
In the sea that eats the land at home,
Eats the whole land at home.

Nigeria

THIS PAGE IS LOCKED TO FREE MEMBERS

Purchase full membership to immediately unlock this page

DELVE INTO FANTASY, MAGIC, MYTHOLOGY & FOLKLORE

Forgotten Books' Full Membership gives access to 797,885 ancient and modern, fiction and non-fiction books.

Continue

*Fair usage policy applies

Night Rain

What time of night it is
I do not know
Except that like some fish
Doped out of the deep
I have bobbed up bellywise
From stream of sleep
And no cocks crow.
It is drumming hard here
And I suppose everywhere
Droning with insistent ardour upon
Our roof-thatch and shed
And through sheaves slit open
To lighting and rafters
I cannot make out overhead
Great water drops are dribbling
Falling like orange or mango
Fruits showered forth in the wind
Or perhaps I should say so
Much like beads I could in prayer tell
Them on string as they break
In wooden bowls and earthenware
Mother is busy now deploying
About our roomlet and floor.
Although it is so dark
I know her practised step as
She moves her bins, bags, and vats
Out of the run of water
That like ants filing out of the wood
Will scatter and gain possession
Of the floor. Do not tremble then
But turn brothers, turn upon your side
Of the loosening mats
To where the others lie.
We have drunk tonight of a spell
Deeper than the owl's or bat's

That wet of wings may not fly.
Bedraggled upon the *iroko*, they stand
Emptied of hearts, and
Therefore will not stir, no, not
Even at dawn for then
They must scurry in to hide.
So we'll roll over on our back
And again roll to the beat
Of drumming all over the land
And under its ample soothing hand
Joined to that of the sea
We will settle to sleep of the innocent.

The Imprisonment of Obatala

Those stick-insect figures! they rock the dance
Of snakes, dart after Him daddy-long arms,
Tangle their loping strides to mangrove stance
And He, roped in the tightening pit of alarms
Dangles in His front, full length,
Invincible limbs cramped by love of their strength.

And that mischievous stir, late sown or spilt
On the way between homestead and stream,
Wells up in pots long stagnant on stilt,
Brims out to where ancestral eyes gleam
Till angry waves dam His track
And caterpillars riding break their back.

One leap upon the charcoal-coloured ass
Swishing ochre urine towards palace and sun,
Kicking impatient tattoo on the grass,
And generations unborn spared the wrong.
But the cry of a child at what it knows not
Evokes trebly there the droop, mud-crack, and clot.

NIGERIA

Easter

So death
being the harvest of God
when this breath
has blown uncertain above the sod,
what seed, cast out in turmoil
to sprout, shall in despair
not beat the air
who falls on rock swamp or the yielding soil?

In thrall
mute with the soft pad of sheet
hung up on the wall,
I draw in my hook-feet:
hear the reaper's cry! the rap
of his crook on the door –
but the poor
dupe! opening, shall find bats far gone with my sap.

For Granny (from Hospital)

Tell me, before the ferryman's return,
What was that stirred within your soul,
One night fifteen floods today,
When upon a dugout
Mid pilgrim lettuce on the Niger,
You with a start strained me to breast:
Did you that night in the raucous voice
Of yesterday's rain,
Tumbling down banks of reed
To feed a needless stream,
Then recognize the loud note of quarrels
And endless dark nights of intrigue
In Father's house of many wives?
Or was it wonder at those footless stars

Who in their long translucent fall
Make shallow silten floors
Beyond the pale of muddy waters
Appear more plumbless than the skies?

Ibadan

Ibadan,
running splash of rust
and gold – flung and scattered
among seven hills like broken
china in the sun.

Fulani Cattle

Contrition twines me like a snake
Each time I come upon the wake
Of your clan,
Undulating along in agony,
You face a stool for mystery:
What secret hope or knowledge,
Locked in your hump away from man,
Imbues you with courage
So mute and fierce and wan
That, not demurring nor kicking,
You go to the house of slaughter?
Can it be in the forging
Of your gnarled and crooked horn
You'd experienced passions far stronger
Than storms which brim up the Niger?
Perhaps, the drover's whip no more
On your balding hind and crest
Arouses shocks of ecstasy:
Or likely the drunken journey
From desert, through grass and forest,

To the hungry towns by the sea
Does call at least for rest –
But will you not first vouchsafe to me,
As true the long knife must prevail,
The patience of even your tail?

Cry of Birth

An echo of childhood stalks before me
like evening shadows on the earth,
rolling back into piquant memory
the anguished cry of my birth;

Out of the caverns of nativity
a voice, I little knew as my own
and thought to have shed with infancy,
returns with a sharpness before unknown.

Poor castaways to this darkling shore,
void out of the sea of eternity
and blind, we catch by reflex horror
an instant glimpse, the guilt of our see:

The souls of men are steeped in stupor
who, tenants upon this wild isle unblest,
sleep on, oblivious of its loud nightmare
with wanton motions bedevilling our breast.

All night, through its long reaches and black
I wander as Io, driven by strange passions,
within and out, and for gadfly have at my back
one harrowing shriek of pain and factions –

It comes ceaseless as from the wilderness!
commingled with the vague cogitation
of the sea, its echo of despair and stress
precedes me like a shade to the horizon.

Abiku

Coming and going these several seasons,
Do stay out on the baobab tree,
Follow where you please your kindred spirits
If indoors is not enough for you.
True, it leaks through the thatch
When floods brim the banks,
And the bats and the owls
Often tear in at night through the eaves,
And at harmattan, the bamboo walls
Are ready tinder for the fire
That dries the fresh fish up on the rack.
Still, it's been the healthy stock
To several fingers, to many more will be
Who reach to the sun.
No longer then bestride the threshold
But step in and stay
For good. We know the knife-scars
Serrating down your back and front
Like beak of the sword-fish,
And both your ears, notched
As a bondsman to this house,
Are all relics of your first comings.
Then step in, step in and stay
For her body is tired,
Tired, her milk going sour
Where many more mouths gladden the heart.

Gabriel Okara

The Snowflakes Sail Gently Down

The snowflakes sail gently
down from the misty eye of the sky
and fall lightly lightly on the
winter-weary elms. And the branches
winter-stripped and nude, slowly
with the weight of the weightless snow
bow like grief-stricken mourners
as white funeral cloth is slowly
unrolled over deathless earth.
And dead sleep stealthily from the
heater rose and closed my eyes with
the touch of silk cotton on water falling.

Then I dreamed a dream
in my dead sleep. But I dreamed
not of earth dying and elms a vigil
keeping. I dreamed of birds, black
birds flying in my inside, nesting
and hatching on oil palms bearing suns
for fruits and with roots denting the
uprooters' spades. And I dreamed the
uprooters tired and limp, leaning on my roots –
their abandoned roots
and the oil palms gave them each a sun.

But on their palms
they balanced the blinding orbs

THIS PAGE IS LOCKED TO FREE MEMBERS

Purchase full membership to immediately unlock this page

Get Smart

Over 2,000 years of human knowledge in 797,885 volumes

Instant access $8.99/month

Continue

*Fair usage policy applies

coaxing diminuendo, counterpoint,
crescendo. But lost in the labyrinth
of its complexities, it ends in the middle
of a phrase at a daggerpoint.

And I lost in the morning mist
of an age at a riverside keep
wandering in the mystic rhythm
of jungle drums and the concerto.

Were I to Choose

When Adam broke the stone
and red streams raged down to
gather in the womb,
an angel calmed the storm;

And I, the breath mewed
in Cain, unblinking gaze
at the world without
from the brink of an age

That draws from the groping lips
a breast-muted cry
to thread the years.
(O were I to choose)

And now the close of one
and thirty turns, the world
of bones is Babel, and
the different tongues within
are flames the head
continually burning.

And O of this dark halo
were the tired head free.

And when the harmattan
of days has parched the throat

and skin, and sucked the fever
of the head away,

Then the massive dark
descends, and flesh and bone
are razed. And (O were I
to choose) I'd cheat the worms
and silence seek in stone.

The Mystic Drum

The mystic drum beat in my inside
and fishes danced in the rivers
and men and women danced on land
to the rhythm of my drum

But standing behind a tree
with leaves around her waist
she only smiled with a shake of her head.

Still my drum continued to beat,
rippling the air with quickened
tempo compelling the quick
and the dead to dance and sing
with their shadows –

But standing behind a tree
with leaves around her waist
she only smiled with a shake of her head.

Then the drum beat with the rhythm
of the things of the ground
and invoked the eye of the sky
the sun and the moon and the river gods –
and the trees began to dance,
the fishes turned men
and men turned fishes
and things stopped to grow –

But standing behind a tree
with leaves around her waist
she only smiled with a shake of her head.

And then the mystic drum
in my inside stopped to beat –
and men became men,
fishes became fishes
and trees, the sun and the moon
found their places, and the dead
went to the ground and things began to grow.

And behind the tree she stood
with roots sprouting from her
feet and leaves growing on her head
and smoke issuing from her nose
and her lips parted in her smile
turned cavity belching darkness.

Then, then I packed my mystic drum
and turned away; never to beat so loud any more.

Adhiambo

I hear many voices
like it's said a madman hears;
I hear trees talking
like it's said a medicine man hears.

Maybe I'm a madman,
I'm a medicine man.

Maybe I'm mad,
for the voices are luring me,
urging me from the midnight
moon and the silence of my desk
to walk on wave crests across a sea.

Maybe I'm a medicine man
hearing talking saps,

THIS PAGE IS LOCKED TO FREE MEMBERS

Purchase full membership to immediately unlock this page

DELVE INTO FANTASY, MAGIC, MYTHOLOGY & FOLKLORE

Forgotten Books' Full Membership gives access to 797,885 ancient and modern, fiction and non-fiction books.

Continue

*Fair usage policy applies

the instinct's vital call,
a desire in a million cells
confined.

O God of the gods and me,
shall I not heed
this prayer-bell call, the noon
angelus, because my stork is caged
in Singed Hair and Dark Skin?

One Night at Victoria Beach

The wind comes rushing from the sea,
the waves curling like mambas strike
the sands and recoiling hiss in rage
washing the Aladuras' feet pressing hard
on the sand and with eyes fixed hard
on what only hearts can see, they shouting
pray, the Aladuras pray; and coming
from booths behind, compelling highlife
forces ears; and car lights startle pairs
arm in arm passing washer-words back
and forth like haggling sellers and buyers –

Still they pray, the Aladuras pray
with hands pressed against their hearts
and their white robes pressed against
their bodies by the wind; and drinking
palm-wine and beer, the people boast
at bars at the beach. Still they pray.

They pray, the Aladuras pray
to what only hearts can see while dead
fishermen long dead with bones rolling
nibbled clean by nibbling fishes, follow
four dead cowries shining like stars
into deep sea where fishes sit in judgement;

and living fishermen in dark huts
sit round dim lights with Babalawo
throwing their souls in four cowries
on sand, trying to see tomorrow.

Still, they pray, the Aladuras pray
to what only hearts can see behind
the curling waves and the sea, the stars
and the subduing unanimity of the sky
and their white bones beneath the sand.

And standing dead on dead sands,
I felt my knees touch living sands –
but the rushing wind killed the budding words.

Frank Aig-Imoukhuede

One Wife for One Man

I done try go church, I done go for court
Dem all day talk about di 'new culture':
Dem talk about 'equality', dem mention 'divorce'
Dem holler am so-tay my ear nearly cut;
One wife be for one man.

My fader before my fader get him wife borku.*
E no' get equality palaver; he live well
For he be oga† for im own house.
But dat time done pass before white man come
Wit 'im
One wife for one man.

Tell me how una‡ woman no go make yanga§
Wen'e know say na'im only dey.
Suppose say – make God no 'gree – 'e no born at all?
A'tell you dat man bin dey crazy wey start
One wife for one man.

Jus' tell me how one wife fit do one man;
How go fit stay all time for him house
For time when belleh done kommot.
How many pickin', self, one woman fit born
Wen one wife be for one man?

* borku = plenty. † oga = master or Lord. ‡ una = variation of 'your'.
§ yanga = vanity, pride, and perversity.

THIS PAGE IS LOCKED TO FREE MEMBERS

Purchase full membership to immediately unlock this page

Get Smart

Over 2,000 years of human knowledge in 797,885 volumes

Instant access $8.99/month

Continue

*Fair usage policy applies

Michael Echeruo

Sophia

Left hand is God's hand
Devil's hand across chaos
When Eve began
Was hers in Eden farm
Through cats' tiger's fur
Through Adam's core.

Multiply and till the earth
Plough on virgin land is temptation.

And there was a fountain
Of rain and grain.
Force fountain down gorge
Into valley of shoots
Is not spilling
But will not bloom on Martha
Or *Vita Nuova*

Eat apples by the left hand,
Much sweeter. Right hand
Is Right's hand, bitter,
Sweet gorgeless Sophia.

Christopher Okigbo

From *Lament of the Lavender Mist*

Love Apart

The moon has ascended between us
Between two pines
That bow to each other

Love with the moon has ascended
Has fed on our solitary stems

And we are now shadows
That cling to each other
But kiss the air only.

Eight poems from *Heavensgate*

Overture

Before you, mother Idoto,
naked I stand,
before your watery presence,
a prodigal,

leaning on an oilbean,
lost in your legend. . . .

Under your power wait I
on barefoot,

watchman for the watchword
at heavensgate;
out of the depths my cry
give ear and hearken.

Eyes Watch the Stars

Eyes open on the beach,
eyes open, of the prodigal;
upward to heaven shoot
where stars will fall from.

Which secret I have told into no ear;
into a dughole to hold,
not to drown with –
Which secret I have planted into beachsand;

now breaks
salt-white surf on the stones and me,
and lobsters and shells in
iodine smell –
maid of the salt-emptiness,
sophisticreamy, native,

whose secret I have covered up with beachsand.

Shadow of rain
over sunbeaten beach,
shadow of rain
over man with woman.

Water Maid

Bright
with the armpit dazzle of a lioness,
she answers,

wearing white light about her;

THIS PAGE IS LOCKED TO FREE MEMBERS

Purchase full membership to immediately unlock this page

DELVE INTO FANTASY, MAGIC, MYTHOLOGY & FOLKLORE

Forgotten Books' Full Membership gives access to 797,885 ancient and modern, fiction and non-fiction books.

Continue

*Fair usage policy applies

NIGERIA

I have visited,
on palm beam imprinted
my pentagon –

I have visited, the prodigal. . . .

In palm grove
long drums and cannons:
the spirit in the ascent.

Passion Flower

And the flower weeps
unbruised,
Lacrimae Christi,

For him who was silenced;

whose advent
dumb bells in the dim light celebrate
with wine song:

Messiah will come again,
After the argument in heaven;
Messiah will come again,
Lumen mundi. . . .

Fingers of penitence
bring
to a palm grove
vegetable offering
with five
fingers of chalk.

Lustra

So would I to the hills again
so would I
to where springs the fountain
there to draw from

and to hilltop clamber
body and soul
whitewashed in the moondew
there to see from

So would I from my eye the mist
so would I
through moonmist to hilltop
there for the cleansing

Here is a new-laid egg
here a white hen at midterm.

Bridge

I am standing above you and tide
above the noontide,
Listening to the laughter of waters
that do not know why:

Listening to incense. . . .

I am standing above the noontide
with my head above it,
Under my feet float the waters:
tide blows them under.

Four poems from *Limits*

Siren (& the mortar is not yet dry. . . .)

I Suddenly becoming talkative
like weaverbird
Summoned at offside of
dream remembered

Between sleep and waking,

I hang up my egg-shells
To you of palm grove,

Upon whose bamboo towers hang
Dripping with yesterupwine
A tiger mask and nude spear. . . .

Queen of the damp half-light,
I have had my cleansing,
Emigrant with airborne nose,
The he-goat-on-heat.

2 For he was a shrub among the poplars
Needing more roots
More sap to grow to sunlight
Thirsting for sunlight

A low growth among the forest.

Into the soul
The selves extended their branches
Into the móments of each living hour
Feeling for audience

Straining thin among the echoes;

And out of the solitude
Voice and soul with selves unite
Riding the echoes

Horsemen of the apocalypse

And crowned with one self
The name displays its foliage,
Hanging low

A green cloud above the forest.

3 Banks of reed.
Mountains of broken bottles.

THIS PAGE IS LOCKED TO FREE MEMBERS

Purchase full membership to immediately unlock this page

Get Smart

Over 2,000 years of human knowledge in 797,885 volumes

Instant access $8.99/month

Continue

*Fair usage policy applies

& the dream wakes
& the voice fades
In the damp half-light,
Like a shadow,

Not leaving a mark.

4 An image insists
from the flag-pole of the heart,
The image distracts
with the cruelty of the rose. . . .

My lioness,
(No shield is lead-plate against you)
Wound me with your seaweed face,
Blinded like a strongroom.

Distances of your
armpit-fragrance
Turn chloroform,
enough for my patience –

When you have finished,
& done up my stitches,
Wake me near the altar,

& this poem will be finished.

Wole Soyinka

Telephone Conversation

The price seemed reasonable, location
Indifferent. The landlady swore she lived
Off premises. Nothing remained
But self-confession. 'Madam,' I warned,
'I hate a wasted journey – I am African.'
Silence. Silenced transmission of
Pressurized good-breeding. Voice, when it came,
Lipstick coated, long gold-rolled
Cigarette-holder pipped. Caught I was, foully.
'HOW DARK?' . . . I had not misheard. . . . 'ARE YOU LIGHT
OR VERY DARK?' Button B. Button A. Stench
Of rancid breath of public hide-and-speak.
Red booth. Red pillar-box. Red double-tiered
Omnibus squelching tar. It *was* real! Shamed
By ill-mannered silence, surrender
Pushed dumbfounded to beg simplification.
Considerate she was, varying the emphasis –
'ARE YOU DARK? OR VERY LIGHT?' Revelation came.
'You mean – like plain or milk chocolate?'
Her assent was clinical, crushing in its light
Impersonality. Rapidly, wave-length adjusted,
I chose. 'West African sepia' – and as afterthought,
'Down in my passport.' Silence for spectroscopic
Flight of fancy, till truthfulness clanged her accent
Hard on the mouthpiece. 'WHAT'S THAT?' conceding

'DON'T KNOW WHAT THAT IS.' 'Like brunette.'
'THAT'S DARK, ISN'T IT?' 'Not altogether.
Facially, I am brunette, but madam, you should see
The rest of me. Palm of my hand, soles of my feet
Are a peroxide blonde. Friction, caused –
Foolishly madam – by sitting down, has turned
My bottom raven black – One moment madam!' – sensing
Her receiver rearing on the thunderclap
About my ears – 'Madam,' I pleaded, 'wouldn't you
rather
See for yourself?'

Death in the Dawn

Traveller, you must set out
At dawn. And wipe your feet upon
The dog-nose wetness of the earth.

Let sunrise quench your lamps. And watch
Faint brush pricklings in the sky light
Cottoned feet to break the early earthworm
On the hoe. Now shadows stretch with sap
Not twilight's death and sad prostration.
This soft kindling, soft receding breeds
Racing joys and apprehensions for
A naked day. Burdened hulks retract,
Stoop to the mist in faceless throng
To wake the silent markets – swift, mute
Processions on grey byways. . . . On this
Counterpane, it was –
Sudden winter at the death
Of dawn's lone trumpeter. Cascades
Of white feather-flakes . . . but it proved
A futile rite. Propitiation sped
Grimly on, before.

THIS PAGE IS LOCKED TO FREE MEMBERS

Purchase full membership to immediately unlock this page

DELVE INTO FANTASY, MAGIC, MYTHOLOGY & FOLKLORE

Forgotten Books' Full Membership gives access to 797,885 ancient and modern, fiction and non-fiction books.

Continue

*Fair usage policy applies

Now, your blood-drops are
My sadness in the haze of day
And the sad dew at dawn, fragile
Dew-braiding rivulets in hair-roots where
Desires storm. Sad, sad
Your feather-tear running in clefts between
Thorned buttresses, soon gone, my need
Must drink it all. Be then as
The dry sad air, and I may yield me
As the rain.

4

So let your palm, ridge to ridge
Be cupped with mine
And the thin sad earth between will nurture
Love's misfoundling – and there it ended.
Storm-whispers swayed you outward where
Once, we cupped our hands. Alone I watched.
The earth came sifting through.

5

I shall sit often on the knoll
And watch the grafting.
This dismembered limb must come
Some day
To sad fruition.

I shall weep dryly on the stone
That marks the gravehead silence of
A tamed resolve.

I shall sit often on the knoll
Till longings crumble too
O I have felt the termite nuzzle
White entrails
And fine ants wither
In the mind's unthreaded maze.

Then may you frolic where the head
Lies shaven, inherit all,

Death-watches, cut your beetled capers
On loam-matted hairs. I know this
Weed-usurped knoll. The graveyard now
Was nursery to her fears.

6

This cup I bore, redeem
When yearning splice
The torn branch.

This earth I pour outward to
Your cry, tend it. It knows full
Worship of the plough.
Lest burning follow breath, learn
This air was tempered in wild
Cadences of fire.

No phoenix I. Submission
To her cleansing flames fulfilled
Urn's legacy.

Yet incandescing was the roar alone
Sun-searing haze pools lit the kilns
That bronzed me.

It is peace to settle on life's fingers
Like bran; illusive as the strained meal's
Bloodless separateness.

Be still. And when this cup would crush
The lightness of your hand, build no shrine
Strew the ashes on your path.

Prisoner

Grey, to the low grass cropping
Slung, wet-lichened, wisps from such
Smoke heaviness, elusive of thin blades
Curl inward to the earth, breed
The grey hours,

And days, and years, for do not
The wise grey temples we must build
To febrile years, here begin, not
In tears and ashes, but on the sad mocking
Threads, compulsive of the hour?

In the desert wildness, when, lone cactus,
Cannibal was his love – even amidst the
Crag and gorge, the leap and night-tremors
Even as the potsherd stayed and the sandstorm
Fell – intimations came.

In the whorled centre of the storm, a threnody
But not from this. For that far companion,
Made sudden stranger when the wind slacked
And the centre fell, grief. And the stricken
Potsherd lay, disconsolate – intimations then

But not from these. He knew only
Sudden seizure. And time conquest
Bound him helpless to each grey essence.
Nothing remained if pains and longings
Once, once set the walls. Sadness
Closed him, rootless, lacking cause.

I Think it Rains

I think it rains
That tongues may loosen from the parch
Uncleave roof-tops of the mouth, hang
Heavy with knowledge.

I saw it raise
The sudden cloud, from ashes. Settling
They joined in a ring of grey; within
The circling spirit.

O it must rain
These closures on the mind, binding us

THIS PAGE IS LOCKED TO FREE MEMBERS

Purchase full membership to immediately unlock this page

Get Smart

Over 2,000 years of human knowledge in 797,885 volumes

Instant access $8.99/month

Continue

*Fair usage policy applies

Night

Your hand is heavy, Night, upon my brow,
I bear no heart mercuric like the clouds, to dare
Exacerbation from your subtle plough.

Woman as a clam, on the sea's crescent
I saw your jealous eye quench the sea's
Fluorescence, dance on the pulse incessant

Of the waves. And I stood, drained
Submitting like the sands, blood and brine
Coursing to the roots. Night, you rained
Serrated shadows through dank leaves
Till, bathed in warm suffusion of your dappled cells
Sensations pained me, faceless, silent as night thieves.

Hide me now, when night children haunt the earth
I must hear none! These misted calls will yet
Undo me; naked, unbidden, at Night's muted birth.

Abiku

In vain your bangles cast
Charmed circles at my feet
I am Abiku, calling for the first
And the repeated time.

Must I weep for goats and cowries
For palm oil and the sprinkled ash?
Yams do not sprout in amulets
To earth Abiku's limbs.

So when the snail is burnt in his shell,
Whet the heated fragment, brand me
Deeply on the breast. You must know him
When Abiku calls again.

I am the squirrel teeth, cracked
The riddle of the palm. Remember
This, and dig me deeper still into
The god's swollen foot.

Once and the repeated time, ageless
Though I puke; and when you pour
Libations, each finger points me near
The way I came, where

The ground is wet with mourning
White dew suckles flesh-birds
Evening befriends the spider, trapping
Flies in wind-froth;

Night, and Abiku sucks the oil
From lamps. Mothers! I'll be the
Suppliant snake coiled on the doorstep
Yours the killing cry.

The ripest fruit was saddest;
Where I crept, the warmth was cloying.
In the silence of webs, Abiku moans, shaping
Mounds from the yolk.

THIS PAGE IS LOCKED TO FREE MEMBERS

Purchase full membership to immediately unlock this page

DELVE INTO FANTASY, MAGIC, MYTHOLOGY & FOLKLORE

Forgotten Books' Full Membership gives access to 797,885 ancient and modern, fiction and non-fiction books.

Continue

*Fair usage policy applies

CLOSED (CLASSIFIED)

Tchicaya U Tam'si

Brush-fire

The fire the river that's to say
the sea to drink following the sand
the feet the hands
within the heart to love
this river that lives in me repeoples me
only to you I said around the fire

my race
it flows here and there a river
the flames are the looks
of those who brood upon it
I said to you
my race
remembers
the taste of bronze drunk hot.

D*ance to the Amulets*

Come over here
our grass is rich
come you fawns

gestures and stabs of sickly hands
curving then unripping of conception
one – who? – you shape my fate
come you fawns

CONGO (BRAZZAVILLE)

over here the suppleness of mornings
and the blood masked here
and the rainbow-coloured dream the rope at the neck
come over here

our grass is rich here
my first coming
was the harsh explosion of a flint
solitude
my mother promised me to light.

Still Life

I was playing
when my dead sister
my knife-grandfather
my grandfather hung
a great fish
on a tree before our gate.

We adored aubergines
I devoured the little gourds
but I had to fast

also I cried with hunger,
if I tell you
my father does not know my mother's name
I am the witness of my age
I have often seen
carcases in the air
where my blood burns.

A Mat to Weave

he came to deliver the secret of the sun
and wanted to write the poem of his life

THIS PAGE IS LOCKED TO FREE MEMBERS

Purchase full membership to immediately unlock this page

Get Smart

Over 2,000 years of human knowledge in 797,885 volumes

Instant access $8.99/month

Continue

*Fair usage policy applies

CONGO (BRAZZAVILLE)

the grains of sand between the teeth
is it thus that one breaks the world
no
no
his stream was the gentlest of cups
the safest
it was his most living flesh

here begins the poem of his life
he was trained in a school
he was trained in a studio
and he saw roads planted with sphinxes

still he is left with the soft arch of his laughter
then the tree then the water then the leaves

that is why you will see him
the marching canoers have raised once more
against the haulers of french cotton
their cries
this flight is a flight of doves

the leeches did not know the bitterness
of this blood
in the purest of cups

dirty gollywog
behold my congolese head

it is the purest of cups.

Congo (Léopoldville)

THIS PAGE IS LOCKED TO FREE MEMBERS

Purchase full membership to immediately unlock this page

DELVE INTO FANTASY, MAGIC, MYTHOLOGY & FOLKLORE

Forgotten Books' Full Membership gives access to 797,885 ancient and modern, fiction and non-fiction books.

Continue

*Fair usage policy applies

wait while I put on my brow my mask of blood
and soon you will see
my tongue flutter like a banner.

A Fistful of News

The hills hunch their backs
and leap above the marshes
that wash about the calabash
of the Great Soul

Rumours of treason spread
like burning swords
the veins of the earth
swell with nourishing blood
the earth bears
towns villages hamlets
forests and woods
peopled with monsters horned and tentacled
their long manes are the mirror of the Sun

they are those who when night has come
direct the regiments of bats
and who sharpen their arms
upon the stone of horror.

the souls of the guilty
float in the currents of air
on the galleys of disaster
paying no heed to the quarrels of the earthbound
with fangs of fire
they tear from the lightning its diamond heart.

Surely the scorn is a gobbet of smoking flesh
surely the spirits recite the rosary of vengeance
but like the black ear of wickedness
they have never understood a single word

of the scorpion's obscure tongue:
stubbornness

nor the anger of the snake-wizard
nor the violence of the throwing-knife
can do anything against it.

THIS PAGE IS LOCKED TO FREE MEMBERS

Purchase full membership to immediately unlock this page

Get Smart

Over 2,000 years of human knowledge in 797,885 volumes

Instant access $8.99/month

Continue

*Fair usage policy applies

CODE ASTRO PHYSICS

Aguinaldo Fonseca

Tavern by the Sea

A distant glimmer
And a beacon spitting light
In the black face of night.

Everything is brine and yearning.

Winds with waves on their back
Make tremble the tavern
Which is an anchored ship.

Love passionate and brutal
Amidst the open knives
And the abandon
Of a prostitute's embrace.

Upon the air despairings rise
In heavy swells of smoke.

Bottles, glasses, bottles ...
– Oh! the thirst of a sailor ...

Tattooings pricked on skin
Proclaim the pain and the bravado
Of escapades in ports.

Men of every race,
Men without homeland or name
– Just men of the sea
With voice of salt and wind
And ships in unclouded eyes.

CAPE VERDE ISLANDS

Boredom and longing appear
Chewing on aged pipes ...
Appear and then depart
Staggering off with a drunk.

Cards, tables, and chairs,
Bottles, glasses, bottles
And the tavern-keeper's face
Stirring up ancient quarrels.

And everything is full of sin
And everything is full of sleep
And everything is full of sea!

THIS PAGE IS LOCKED TO FREE MEMBERS

Purchase full membership to immediately unlock this page

DELVE INTO FANTASY, MAGIC, MYTHOLOGY & FOLKLORE

Forgotten Books' Full Membership gives access to 797,885 ancient and modern, fiction and non-fiction books.

Continue

*Fair usage policy applies

Aldo do Espirito Santo

Where are the Men Seized in this Wind of Madness?
Blood falling in drops to the earth
men dying in the forest
and blood falling, falling . . .
on those cast into the sea. . . .
Fernão Dias for ever in the story
of Ilha Verde, red with blood,
of men struck down
in the vast arena of the quay.
Alas the quay, the blood, the men,
the fetters, the lash of beatings
resound, resound, resound
dropping in the silence of prostrated lives
of cries, and howls of pain
from men who are men no more,
in the hands of nameless butchers.
Zé Mulato, in the story of the quay
shooting men in the silence
of bodies falling.
Alas Zé Mulato, Zé Mulato,
The victims cry for vengeance
The sea, the sea of Fernão Dias
devouring human lives
is bloody red.
– We are arisen –
Our eyes are turned to you.
Our lives entombed

in fields of death,
men of the Fifth of February
men fallen in the furnace of death
imploring pity
screaming for life,
dead without air, without water
they all arise
from the common grave
and upright in the chorus of justice
cry for vengeance. . . .
The fallen bodies in the forest,
the homes, the homes of men
destroyed in the gulf
of ravening fire,
lives incinerated,
raise the unaccustomed chorus of justice
crying for vengeance.
And all you hangmen
all you torturers
sitting in the dock:
– What have you done with my people? . . .
– What do you answer?
– Where is my people? . . .
And I answer in the silence
of voices raised
demanding justice. . . .
One by one, through all the line. . . .
For you, tormentors,
forgiveness has no name.
Justice shall be heard.
And the blood of lives fallen
in the forests of death,
innocent blood
drenching the earth
in a silence of terrors
shall make the earth fruitful,
crying for justice.

THIS PAGE IS LOCKED TO FREE MEMBERS

Purchase full membership to immediately unlock this page

Get Smart

Over 2,000 years of human knowledge in 797,885 volumes

Instant access $8.99/month

Continue

*Fair usage policy applies

Angola

THIS PAGE IS LOCKED TO FREE MEMBERS

Purchase full membership to immediately unlock this page

DELVE INTO FANTASY, MAGIC, MYTHOLOGY & FOLKLORE

Forgotten Books' Full Membership gives access to 797,885 ancient and modern, fiction and non-fiction books.

Continue

*Fair usage policy applies

who thirst
who are ashamed to call you mother
who are afraid to cross the streets
who are afraid of men

It is ourselves
the hope of life recovered.

Antonio Jacinto

Monangamba

On that big estate there is no rain
it's the sweat of my brow that waters the crops:

On that big estate there is coffee ripe
and that cherry-redness
is drops of my blood turned sap.

The coffee will be roasted,
ground, and crushed,
will turn black, black with the colour of the *contratado*.

Black with the colour of the *contratado*!

Ask the birds that sing,
the streams in carefree wandering
and the high wind from inland:

Who gets up early? Who goes to toil?
Who is it carries on the long road
the hammock or bunch of kernels?
Who reaps and for pay gets scorn
rotten maize, rotten fish,
ragged clothes, fifty *angolares*
beating for biting back?

Who?

Who makes the millet grow
and the orange groves to flower?
– Who?

Who gives the money for the boss to buy
cars, machinery, women
and Negro heads for the motors?

Who makes the white man prosper,
grow big-bellied – get much money?
– Who?

And the birds that sing,
the streams in carefree wandering
and the high wind from inland
will answer:

– Monangambeeee. . . .

Ah! Let me at least climb the palm trees
Let me drink wine, palm wine
and fuddled by my drunkness forget

– Monangambeee. . . .

THIS PAGE IS LOCKED TO FREE MEMBERS

Purchase full membership to immediately unlock this page

Get Smart

Over 2,000 years of human knowledge in 797,885 volumes

Instant access $8.99/month

Continue

*Fair usage policy applies

Mazisi Kunene

To the Proud

In the twirling mountains overhung with mist
Foretell Nodongo the proud name of the subsequent hours
Since, when you beat the loud music of your wings,
The secret night creeps underneath the measured time.

When you behold the fixed bulk of the sun
Jubilant in its uncertain festivals
Know that the symbol on which you stand shall vanish
Now that the dawning awaits us with her illusions.

Assemble the little hum of your pealing boast
For the sake of the reward meted to Somndeni
Who sat abundantly pride-flowing
Till the passer-by vultures of heaven overtook him.

We who stood by you poverty-stricken
Shall abandon you to the insanity of licence
And follow the winding path
Where the wisdom granaries hold increase.

Then shall your nakedness show
Teasing you before the unashamed sun.
Itching you shall unfurl the night
But we the sons of Time shall be our parents' race.

The Echoes

Over the vast summer hills
I shall commission the maternal sun
To fetch you with her long tilted rays,

The slow heave of the valleys
Will once again roll the hymns of accompaniment
Scattering the glitter of the milky way over the bare fields.

You will meet me
Underneath the shadow of the timeless earth
Where I lie weaving the seasons.

You will indulge in the sway dances of your kin
To the time of symphonic flutes
Ravishing the identity of water lilies.

I have opened the mountain gates
So that the imposing rim
Of the Ruwenzori shall steal your image.

Even the bubbling lips of continents
(To the shy palms of Libya)
Shall awake the long-forgotten age.

The quivering waters of the Zambezi river
Will bear on a silvery blanket your name
Leading it to the echoing of the sea.

Let me not love you alone
Lest the essence of your being
Lie heavy on my tongue
When you count so many to praise.

Farewell

O beloved farewell. . . .
Hold these leaping dreams of fire
With the skeletal hands of death

THIS PAGE IS LOCKED TO FREE MEMBERS

Purchase full membership to immediately unlock this page

DELVE INTO FANTASY, MAGIC, MYTHOLOGY & FOLKLORE

Forgotten Books' Full Membership gives access to 797,885 ancient and modern, fiction and non-fiction books.

Continue

*Fair usage policy applies

Bloke Modisane

lonely

it gets awfully lonely,
lonely;
like screaming,
screaming lonely;
screaming down dream alley,
screaming of blues, like none can hear;
but you hear me clear and loud:
echoing loud;
like it's for you I scream.

I talk to myself when I write,
shout and scream to myself,
then to myself
scream and shout:
shouting a prayer,
screaming noises,
knowing this way I tell
the world about still lives;
even maybe
just to scream and shout.

is it I lack the musician's contact
direct?
or, is it true, the writer
creates
(except the trinity with God, the machine and he)

incestuous silhouèttes
to each other scream and shout,
to me shout and scream
pry and mate;
inbred deformities of loneliness.

THIS PAGE IS LOCKED TO FREE MEMBERS

Purchase full membership to immediately unlock this page

Get Smart

Over 2,000 years of human knowledge in 797,885 volumes

Instant access $8.99/month

Continue

*Fair usage policy applies

David Rubadiri

An African Thunderstorm

From the west
Clouds come hurrying with the wind
Turning
Sharply
Here and there
Like a plague of locusts
Whirling
Tossing up things on its tail
Like a madman chasing nothing.

Pregnant clouds
Ride stately on its back
Gathering to perch on hills
Like dark sinister wings;
The Wind whistles by
And trees bend to let it pass.

In the village
Screams of delighted children
Toss and turn
In the din of whirling wind,
Women –
Babies clinging on their backs –
Dart about
In and out
Madly
The Wind whistles by
Whilst trees bend to let it pass.

NYASALAND

Clothes wave like tattered flags
Flying off
To expose dangling breasts
As jaggered blinding flashes
Rumble, tremble, and crack
Amidst the smell of fired smoke
And the pelting march of the storm.

THIS PAGE IS LOCKED TO FREE MEMBERS

Purchase full membership to immediately unlock this page

DELVE INTO FANTASY, MAGIC, MYTHOLOGY & FOLKLORE

Forgotten Books' Full Membership gives access to 797,885 ancient and modern, fiction and non-fiction books.

Continue

*Fair usage policy applies

John Mbiti

New York Skyscrapers

The weak scattered rays of yellow sun
Peeped through the hazy tissues
That blanketed them with transparent wax;
And as the wrinkled rays closed the day,
Smoky chimneys of New York coughed
Looking down in bended towers
And vomited sad tears of dark smoke.

Joseph Kariuki

Come Away, my Love

Come away, my love, from streets
Where unkind eyes divide,
And shop windows reflect our difference.
In the shelter of my faithful room rest.

There, safe from opinions, being behind
Myself, I can see only you;
And in my dark eyes your grey
Will dissolve.
The candlelight throws
Two dark shadows on the wall
Which merge into one as I close beside you.

When at last the lights are out,
And I feel your hand in mine,
Two human breaths join in one,
And the piano weaves
Its unchallenged harmony.

THIS PAGE IS LOCKED TO FREE MEMBERS

Purchase full membership to immediately unlock this page

Get Smart

Over 2,000 years of human knowledge in 797,885 volumes

Instant access $8.99/month

Continue

*Fair usage policy applies

José Craveirinha

The Seed is in Me

Dead or living
the seed is in me
in the universal whiteness of my bones

All feel
uneasiness
at the undoubted whiteness of my bones
white as the breasts of Ingrids or Marias
in Scandinavian lands
or in Polana the smart quarter
of my old native town.

All feel
uneasiness
that the mingling in my veins should be
blood from the blood of every blood
and instead of the peace ineffable of pure and simple birth
and a pure and simple death
breed a rash of complexes
from the seed of my bones.

But a night with the massaleiras heavy with green fruit
batuques swirl above the sweating stones
and the tears of rivers

All feel
uneasiness
at the white seed in me
breeding a rash inflamed with malediction.

MOÇAMBIQUE

And one day
will come all the Marias of the distant nations
penitent or no
weeping
laughing
or loving to the rhythm of a song

To say to my bones
forgive us, brother.

Three Dimensions

In the cabin . . .
the god of the machine
in cap and overalls
holds in his hand the secret of the pistons.

In the carriage . . .
the first-class god
elaborates his schemes in regulated air.

And on the branch-line . . .
– feet flat against the steel of the coaches –
bursting his lungs
the god of the trolley.

THIS PAGE IS LOCKED TO FREE MEMBERS

Purchase full membership to immediately unlock this page

DELVE INTO FANTASY, MAGIC, MYTHOLOGY & FOLKLORE

Forgotten Books' Full Membership gives access to 797,885 ancient and modern, fiction and non-fiction books.

Continue

*Fair usage policy applies

in its intense inhuman scent;
and the wrap of tenderness spread by the sun
over the light mat of petals
has waited since summer for my sister's child
to rest himself upon it. . . .
In vain, in vain,
a chirico sings and sings perched among the garden reeds,
for the little boy of my missing sister,
the victim of the forest's vaporous dawns.
Ah, I know, I know: at the last there was a glitter
of farewell in those gentle eyes,
and her voice came like a murmur hoarse,
tragic and despairing. . . .

O Africa, my motherland, answer me:
What was done to my forest sister,
that she comes no more to the city with her eternal little
ones
(one on her back, one in her womb),
with her eternal charcoal-vendor's cry?
O Africa, my motherland,
you at least will not forsake my heroic sister,
she shall live in the proud memorial of your arms!

Valente Malangatana

To the Anxious Mother

Into your arms I came
when you bore me, very anxious
you, who were so alarmed
at that monstrous moment
fearing that God might take me.
Everyone watched in silence
to see if the birth was going well
everyone washed their hands
to be able to receive the one who came from Heaven
and all the women were still and afraid.
But when I emerged
from the place where you sheltered me so long
at once I drew my first breath
at once you cried out with joy
the first kiss was my grandmother's.
And she took me at once to the place
where they kept me, hidden away
everyone was forbidden to enter my room
because everyone smelt bad
and I all fresh, fresh
breathed gently, wrapped in my napkins.
But grandmother, who seemed like a madwoman,
always looking and looking again
because the flies came at me
and the mosquitoes harried me
God who also watched over me
was my old granny's friend.

Woman

In the cool waters of the river
we shall have fish that are huge
which shall give the sign of
the end of the world perhaps
because they will make an end of woman
woman who adorns the fields
woman who is the fruit of man.

The flying fish makes an end of searching
because woman is the gold of man
when she sings she ever seems
like the fado-singer's well-tuned guitar
when she dies, I shall cut off
her hair to deliver me from sin.

Woman's hair shall be the blanket
over my coffin when another Artist
calls me to Heaven to paint me
woman's breasts shall be my pillow
woman's eye shall open up for me the way to heaven
woman's belly shall give birth to me up there
and woman's glance shall watch me
as I go up to Heaven.

THIS PAGE IS LOCKED TO FREE MEMBERS

Purchase full membership to immediately unlock this page

Get Smart

Over 2,000 years of human knowledge in 797,885 volumes

Instant access $8.99/month

Continue

*Fair usage policy applies

Sources of the Poems

AIG-IMOUKHUEDE: poem from MS.
AWOONOR-WILLIAMS: all poems from *Okyeame*, I (1961).
BOLAMBA: all poems from *Esanzo*.
BREW: both poems from *Okyeame*, I (1961).
CLARK: all poems from MSS.
CRAVEIRINHA: both poems from Andrade's anthology.
DE SOUSA: poem from Andrade's anthology.
DIOP (BIRAGO): all poems from *Leurres et lueurs*.
DIOP (DAVID): all poems from *Coups de pilon*.
ECHERUO: poem from MS.
FONSECA: poem from Andrade's anthology.
JACINTO: poem from Andrade's anthology.
KARIUKI: poem from MS.
KOMEY: poem from *Black Orpheus*.
KUNENE: all poems from MSS.
MALANGATANA: both poems from MSS.
MBITI: poem from MS.
MODISANE: poem from MS.
NETO: poem from Andrade's anthology.
OKARA: *The Snowflakes Sail Gently Down*, *Adhiambo*, *The Mystic Drum*, and *One Night at Victoria Beach* from MSS; *Were I to Choose*, *Piano and Drums*, and *Spirit of the Wind* from *Black Orpheus*.
OKIGBO: all poems from MSS.
PETERS: all poems from MSS.
RABÉARIVELO: all poems from Senghor's anthology.
RANAIVO: both poems from Senghor's anthology.
RUBADIRI: poem from MS.
SANTO: poem from Andrade's anthology.
SENGHOR: *In Memoriam*, *Night of Sine*, *Luxembourg 1939*, *Totem*, *Paris in the Snow*, *Blues*, *The Dead*, *Prayer to Masks*,

Visit, and *All Day Long* from *Chants d'ombres* and *Hosties noires*; *In what Tempestuous Night* and *New York* from *Éthiopiques*; *You Held the Black Face, I will Pronounce your Name*, and *Be not Amazed* from *Chants pour Naëtt*.

SOYINKA: *Season* from *Black Orpheus*; all other poems from MSS.

U TAM'SI: all poems from *Feu de Brousse*.

The following key works are referred to above and in the following Notes:

Senghor's anthology: *Nouvelle Anthologie de la poésie nègre et malgache*, edited by L. S. Senghor, with an introduction *L'Orphée noir* by Jean-Paul Sartre (Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1948).

Andrade's *Caderno*: *Caderno da poesia negra de expressão portuguesa* edited by Mário de Andrade (Lisbon, 1953).

Andrade's anthology: *Antologia da poesia negra de expressão portuguesa* edited by Mário de Andrade and preceded by *Cultura negro-africana e assimilacão* (Paris, Oswald, 1958).

Black Orpheus: Journal of African and Afro-American Literature, published twice or thrice yearly since 1957, from the Ministry of Education, Ibadan, Nigeria.

Présence Africaine: Cultural Review of the Negro World, published regularly since 1947, of recent years bi-monthly and in both French and English editions, by Présence Africaine, Paris.

THIS PAGE IS LOCKED TO FREE MEMBERS

Purchase full membership to immediately unlock this page

DELVE INTO FANTASY, MAGIC, MYTHOLOGY & FOLKLORE

Forgotten Books' Full Membership gives access to 797,885 ancient and modern, fiction and non-fiction books.

Continue

*Fair usage policy applies

Notes on the Authors

AIG-IMOUKHUEDE, FRANK: b. 1935 at Edunabon near Ife in the Yoruba country of Western Nigeria, though his home is in Benin Province. Attended at least fifteen primary schools, then Igbobi College and University College, Ibadan, where he contributed poetry to J.P. Clark's *The Horn*. Recently worked for a national daily in Lagos and is now back in Ibadan as an Information Officer. Has written a number of plays for broadcasting. The first of the young Nigerian poets to attempt writing in pidgin English. Two of his poems have appeared in *Black Orpheus*.

AWOONOR-WILLIAMS, GEORGE: b. 1935 at Wheta, near Keta in the Togo Region of Ghana, of a Sierra Leonian father and a Togolese mother. Educated at Achimota and the University of Ghana, where he now works in the Institute of African Studies, specializing in vernacular poetry. Edits the Ghanaian literary review *Okyeame*, in which some of his poems have appeared.

BOLAMBA, ANTOINE-ROGER: born in the former Belgian Congo. Has published numerous articles and poems in the review *La Voix du Congolais*, of which he was Editor. Influenced by Césaire. Has published *Esanzo*, poems (Présence Africaine, 1956).

BREW, KWESI: b. 1928 at Cape Coast in Ghana. Graduated at the University of Ghana. Published poetry in the first number of the Ghanaian literary review *Okyeame*. Now working at the Foreign Office at Accra.

CLARK, JOHN PEPPER: b. 1935 in the Ijaw country of the Niger Delta, Nigeria. Educated at Government College, Warri, and the University College, Ibadan. While at Ibadan founded an influential poetry magazine, *The Horn*. Since 1960 has worked as a journalist in Ibadan and Lagos and is now at

Princeton on a fellowship. He has published several poems in *Black Orpheus* and his first play, *Song of a Goat*, was produced at Ibadan and Enugu in 1962. A free spirit and an abundant talent. Has published *Song of a Goat*, play (Ibadan, Mbari, 1962) and *Poems* (Mbari, 1962).

CRAVEIRINHA, JOSÉ: b. 1922 at Lourenço Marques, where he works as a journalist. His poems have appeared in various periodicals and in Andrade's anthology.

DE SOUSA, NOEMIA: b. 1927 at Lourenço Marques. The first African woman to achieve a genuine reputation as a modern poet, she has published poetry in a number of Brazilian, Angolan, and Moçambique journals and in Andrade's *Caderno* and anthology.

DIOP, BIRAGO: b. 1906 at Dakar, Senegal. Studied at Lycée Faidherbe in St Louis and later qualified as a veterinary surgeon. Has spent much of his life in Upper Volta as a government veterinary officer. His output is small, but carefully and exquisitely composed. Had several poems in Senghor's anthology. Has published *Leurres et lueurs*, poems (Présence Africaine, 1960), *Les Contes d'Amadou Koumba* (Paris, Fasquelle, 1947), *Les Nouveaux Contes d'Amadou Koumba* (Présence Africaine, 1958).

DIOP, DAVID: b. 1927 at Bordeaux of a Senegalese father and a Cameroonian mother. Killed in an air-crash off Dakar in 1960. Throughout his short life Diop was in poor health and was often in hospital. Moved frequently from his childhood onwards between France and West Africa. Was a regular contributor to *Présence Africaine* and had several early poems in Senghor's anthology. Has published *Coups de pilon*, poems (Présence Africaine, 1956).

ECHERUO, MICHAEL: b. 1937 in Owerri Province in the Ibo country of Eastern Nigeria. Educated at Stella Maris College, Port Harcourt, and University College, Ibadan, where he read English. Now lecturing in English at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, but is at present at Cornell on a fellowship. He produced J. P. Clark's *Song of a Goat* at Enugu in 1962.

FONSECA, AGUINALDO: b. 1922 in the Cape Verde Islands. Has worked on numerous literary reviews, including *Seara Nova*, *Atlantico*, and *Nundo Literario* and has contributed to Andrade's anthology. Has published *Linha do horizonte*,

THIS PAGE IS LOCKED TO FREE MEMBERS

Purchase full membership to immediately unlock this page

Get Smart

Over 2,000 years of human knowledge in 797,885 volumes

Instant access $8.99/month

Continue

*Fair usage policy applies

MODISANE, BLOKE: b. 1923 at Johannesburg, where he was educated. Worked for some years on *Drum* magazine but fled from South Africa a few years ago and now lives and works in London as a writer, actor, and broadcaster. Has published short stories and articles in many periodicals and is now working on three books: a collection of South African stories, another of his own stories, and an autobiography. He played a leading role in the London production of Genet's *The Blacks*.

NETO, AGOSTINHO: b. 1922 at Icola e Bengo in Angola. Studied medicine in Lisbon and returned to practise in Angola. Associated with the movement led by Viriato da Cruz for the 'rediscovery' of Angola's indigenous culture. In 1960 Neto was elected President of the Angolan Liberation Movement MPLA. In 1960 he was arrested and taken to Portugal for imprisonment. But in 1962 it was announced that he had escaped from Portugal with the aid of the democratic resistance movement. Has published poetry in Portuguese and Angolan reviews and in Andrade's *Caderno* and anthology.

OKARA, GABRIEL: b. 1921 in the Ijaw country of the Niger Delta, Nigeria. Educated at Government College, Umuahia, he then became a book-binder. At that time he began to write plays and features for broadcasting. He is now Information Officer with the Eastern Regional Government at Enugu. Several of his poems have appeared in *Black Orpheus*, starting with the first number in 1957. He has just completed a novel. A self-sufficient, deeply read, and thoughtful poet.

OKIGBO, CHRISTOPHER: b. 1932 at Ojoto near Onitsha in the Ibo country of Eastern Nigeria. The imagery of his poetry is often rooted in the groves, shrines, and sacred streams of his birthplace. Educated at Government College, Umuahia, and University College, Ibadan, where he read Classics. From 1956 to 1958 he was Private Secretary to the Federal Minister of Research and Information, then taught for two years at Fiditi near Ibadan before joining the Library staff at the University of Nigeria. He is now West African representative of the Cambridge University Press. A voracious reader, whose passion for classical poetry seems to be reflected in his own fastidious craftsmanship. He has published *Heavensgate*,

poems (Ibadan, Mbari, 1962), *Limits and* Other *Poems* (Mbari, 1962).

PETERS, LENRIE: b. 1932 at Bathurst. Educated at Bathurst, Freetown, and Trinity College, Cambridge, where he took a medical degree in 1959. Now studying surgery at Guildford. He is an amateur singer and broadcaster and has completed a novel which is now under consideration.

RABÉARIVELO, JEAN-JOSEPH: b. 1901 at Antananarivo, Madagascar, of a noble but poor family. Left school at thirteen and began writing poetry at an early age. His early work is imitative, for he had to teach himself a mastery of French literary form before he could develop his own ardent style. He founded a literary review and led the way in the creation of a new Madagascan literature written in French. Passionate and restless in temperament, he married young and drifted from one job to another. He became a drug-addict and killed himself in 1937 in a mood of despair brought on partly by the persistent refusal of the local officials to let him visit France, the ambition of his life. Several of his poems appeared in Senghor's anthology. Has published *La Coupe de cendres* (1924), *Sylves* (1927), *Volumes* (1928), *Vientes de la Mañana* (Rio de Janeiro), *Presque-songes* (Tananarive, presented by Robert Boudry, chez Henri Vidalie, 1934).

RANAIVO, FLAVIEN: b. 1914 in the Imerina country near Antananarivo, his father being Governor of Arivonimamo. He did not go to school until he was eight and learnt music long before he learnt the alphabet. Since early childhood he has spent much time wandering through the countryside around the capital, and his poetic style is much influenced by vernacular song and ballad forms, especially that called '*hain-teny*'. Hence his crisp use of language, more authentically Madagascan than Rabéarivelo's. Several of his poems appeared in Senghor's anthology. Has published *L'Ombre et le vent* (Preface by O. Monnoni and Illustrations by Andriamampianina, Tananarive, 1947) and *Mes chansons de toujours* (Paris, 1955).

RUBADIRI, DAVID: b. 1930 in Nyasaland. Educated at Makerere College in Uganda and at King's College, Cambridge, where he took the English Tripos. During the

Nyasaland crisis in 1959 he was arrested but went to Cambridge after his release from detention. An active broadcaster while in England, he has recently returned to Nyasaland to teach.

SANTO, ALDO DO ESPIRITO: b. 1926 in São Tomé, where he works as a teacher. Has published poetry in several reviews of São Tomé and Portugal and in Andrade's *Caderno* and anthology.

SENGHOR, LÉOPOLD SÉDAR: b. 1906 at Joal, an old Portuguese coastal settlement in Senegal. He is of the Serere tribe. His father was a groundnut merchant and a Catholic in a land predominantly Moslem. Senghor passed brilliantly from the local *lycée* and at the age of twenty-two went on to the Lycée Louis le Grand in Paris. Later he completed his *agrégation* at the Sorbonne, the first West African to do so. In Paris he met Césaire, Damas, and other black poets and intellectuals from the Caribbean area. Prominent as an intellectual and political leader of West Africa for many years, he has been at various times a teacher at the École Nationale de la France d'Outremer, a member of the Council of Europe, a Dèputy for Senegal in the French National Assembly, and a minister in the French Government. In 1960 installed as first President of the Independent Republic of Senegal. Senghor is the principle African advocate of Négritude and the only African poet who has yet produced a substantial body of work. His style emerged fully formed in his first book, which contains some of his best poems. These display already his characteristic music and imagery, an imagery of the night and the moon, of tenderness and protective presences. Has published *Chants d'ombres*, poems (Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1945), *Hosties noires*, poems (Éditions du Seuil, 1948: reissued with *Chants d'ombre*, 1956), *Chants pour Naëtt*, poems (Paris, Seghers, 1949), *Éthiopiques*, poems (Seuil, 1956), *Nocturnes*, poems (Seuil, 1961), *Langage et poésie négro-africaine*(published in *Poésie et langage*, Maison du Poète, Brussels, 1954), *L'Apport de la poésie nègre* (in *Témoignages sur la poésie du demi-siècle*, Maison du Poète, Brussels, 1953), *Esthétique négro-africaine* (*Diogène*, October 1956).

SOYINKA, WOLE: b. 1935 at Abeokuta in the Yoruba country of Western Nigeria. Educated in Ibadan at Government

THIS PAGE IS LOCKED TO FREE MEMBERS

Purchase full membership to immediately unlock this page

DELVE INTO FANTASY, MAGIC, MYTHOLOGY & FOLKLORE

Forgotten Books' Full Membership gives access to 797,885 ancient and modern, fiction and non-fiction books.

Continue

*Fair usage policy applies

Index of First Lines

THIS PAGE IS LOCKED TO FREE MEMBERS

Purchase full membership to immediately unlock this page

Get Smart

Over 2,000 years of human knowledge in 797,885 volumes

Instant access $8.99/month

Continue

*Fair usage policy applies

Grey, to the low grass cropping 115

he came to deliver the secret of the sun 124

I am standing above you and tide 107
I done try go church, I done go for court 100
I dream in the intimate semi-darkness of an afternoon 50
I have my gri-gri 129
I hear many voices 96
I love to pass my fingers 85
I must hide him in my innermost veins 46
I shall sleep in white calico 80
I think it rains 116
I was playing 124
I will pronounce your name Naëtt, I will declaim you, Naëtt! 54
Ibadan, running splash of rust 89
If we tell, gently, gently 63
In one of the three pots 64
In the cabin . . . 168
In the cool waters of the river 172
In the twirling mountains overhung with mist 151
In those days 59
In vain your bangles cast 118
In your presence I rediscovered my name 57
Into your arms I came 171
it gets awfully lonely 154
It is Sunday 43

Left hand is God's hand 102
Listen comrades of the struggling centuries 56
Lord, you visited Paris on the day of your birth 46

Masks! Oh Masks! 49
My brother you flash your teeth in response to every hypocrisy 57
My mother 145
190

INDEX

Negress my warm rumour of Africa 59
New York! At first I was confused by your beauty 51

O beloved farewell. . . . 152
Oaf the young man who lives down there 37
On that big estate there is no rain 147
Over the vast summer hills 152

Rust is ripeness, rust 117

She whose eyes are prisms of sleep 34
So death 88
So would I to the hills again 106
Suddenly becoming talkative 107

Tell me, before the ferryman's return 88
That multitude of moulded hands 36
The black glassmaker 35
The fire the river that's to say 123
The hide of the black cow is stretched 33
The hills hunch their backs 130
The moon has ascended between us 103
The mystic drum beat in my inside 95
The past 76
The present reigned supreme 69
The price seemed reasonable, location 111
The snowflakes sail gently 92
The spring has swept the ice from all my frozen rivers 47
The storks are coming now 97
The Sun hung by a thread 62
The weak scattered rays of yellow sun 163
The wind comes rushing from the sea 98
They are lying out there beside the captured roads 48
This morning at the Luxembourg, this autumn at the Luxembourg 45
Those stick-insect figures! they rock the dance 87
Thundering drums and cannons 105

Traveller, you must set out 112
We have come home 70
We have come to your shrine to worship 75
What dark tempestuous night has been hiding your face? 51
What invisible rat 33
What time of night it is 86
When Adam broke the stone 94
When at break of day at a riverside 93
When I still can remember 153
Who has strangled the tired voice 169
Woman, rest on my brow your balsam hands, your hands gentler than fur 44
You held the black face of the warrior between your hands 54
You leave your faint depressions 113
You who move like a battered old dream 60
Your hand is heavy, Night, upon my brow 118
Your infancy now a wall of memory 77